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Context to the nugget

Jay talks about the criticality of financial independence if somebody is considering a career in politics. He also talks about some of the fundamental disconnects between the world of business and politics and how that can lead to challenges in people from the world of business settling into the world of politics.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Transition into politics, you were running a family business before you move to politics, so talk to us a little bit about how should people evaluate politics as a career option as against the other means of driving impact?

Baijayant Jay Panda (JP): Politics is certainly one of the most important platform for bringing about change, it has a grip over the levers of policy making unlike any other career, but that doesn't mean it's the only way there are people who have made immense changes for the good of society by being in business by being in technology, by being in a social activism and many other fields but clearly politics has a very direct role to play in bringing about change now having said that I believe our politics both gets too much of a bad name and also by people looking it as a career not enough analysis and scrutiny of how it can or cannot be a career option so in the sense that it gets too much of a bad name it's because we hear so many scandals, such misbehaviour by people in the politics and a lot of that is true, but much of that my experience is systemic we have inherited a system although it is a real democracy we have real elections but many aspects of true democracy have not yet evolved because we simply copy it the pre-independence British Raj system of parliament and governance, which does not have the same numbers of cheques in balances that most of the democracies have, so this is one of my passions I have been arguing for these reforms to happen so that we have more cheques and balances, we have more transparency in politics but when people evaluating politics as a career some people see in it glamour, some people see in it power sadly some see in it as a way of earning, so you have to be clear where you are coming from and if you are interested in genuinely changing society politics can be a wonderful platform to do that as long as you evaluate it what's and all you just don't see it through rose tinted glasses you have to see both the tremendous opportunity for doing good as well as all the pitfalls and the short comings of the system before making that plunge.

DJ: More specifically what are the question people should ask before taking the plunge, specifically around the pitfalls? What's the process of reflection and an enquiry that an individual should go through before they say may be this is the place where I could have a career?

JP: Let's keep in mind that most politicians in our democracy even today either come into politics through family connections or through student politics, from college days many people are involved in politics demonstrations, strikes, college elections and they get into adult politics through that means, now I presume you are talking about somebody who is not coming from that background but somebody who may be a professional or maybe simply a concerned citizen, somebody who wants to bring about change the single biggest things I would point out is to have clarity on how you are going to fund yourself now I have been fortunate that I had a career which or I had a family background which enabled me to get into the politics without having to rely on politics to make a living, now if you are going to rely on politics to make a living then you have to look at the landscape and realize that one of the biggest shortcomings in our democracy is that political funding is not transparent now I mentioned to you about my passion for reform and I have written extensively about this aspect about how we can and how we must reform political funding because unless that is done politics will never be able to attract the truly decent people and that remains the problem I would very much encourage professionals especially who have an ensured or assured their livelihood separately from politics to consider politics as an option because then you don't have to dirty your fingers or get into the not transparent world of political funding, so this is a crucial question and this sort of eliminates a lot of viable people because young professionals obviously would not have yet established their financial securities so one of the aspects I have argued for is state funding, matching funds and also an emphasis on focus on legitimacy and tax paid nature of political funds so this is not the forum to go into details of my proposals for political funding reform but if some of those reforms were in fact to take place over the medium term then it would be even possible for younger professionals, who don't yet have full financial security for the rest of their lives to get into politics and that's why I am such a big advocate of that.

DJ: But let's say for a minute an individual has crossed that financial hurdle and that's taken care of what are the additional mental stage gates that people should have for them to say may be I could be relevant here?

Well there are many I only pointed out the financial security aspect because it is the single biggest hurdle to getting good talented well intentioned citizens into politics now people coming in from other background into politics also need to understand that it can be quite different universe altogether it can be sometime Alison Wonderland because the normal logic that works in the corporate world in the instance doesn't work in the politics and politics is about popularity not necessarily about the logic of the certain actions, politics is about getting the maximum number of people to vote for you and how you achieve that can sometimes take very different paths than would appear rational to many professionals, another thing I would point out is you need to develop a very thick skin because in politics throwing mud and allegations is part of the daily discourse, so don't be surprised if you are under attack just for saying rational logical things that are in the national interest, people will attribute motives to you even if you have none.

DJ: Why people fail when they come into the politics, which elements of politics do they not get?

JP: I think the element that a lot of people don't get is that politics doesn't work on the same rational as it might in the professional setting if you are coming from a business world despite you internal corporate politics, despite ego hassles, despite strategies working or not working everybody has shared a goal of some kind and in politics that's not necessarily the case you would imagine that politicians across the spectrum have a shared goal that whatever is for the national good we should

accept but that's not politics whereas in those company, although companies also have short comings of course but the shareholder's interest drives the rationale of the company so whatever is going to yield to companies success we will largely have the strong role to play in decision making, in politics the very same ideas that you may have championed in government you will find the same people opposing those ideas when they are in opposition not because somehow it become bad for the country but because they wanted it happen to their watch that somebody else doesn't get the credit and the opposite also happens, people who have opposed ideas when they were in the opposition when they come to government suddenly takes the position that it is good for the country and they should go ahead into it, so this kind of logic doesn't really prevail in many professional settings.

DJ: And if you translate that to sort of the traits and characteristics of people to succeed, if you look at intrinsic trades and characteristics, what are the kind of trades and characteristics people should look for within themselves for them to say maybe I could flourish in that sort of fuzzy context?

JP: So here some things will be common with other professions but some things will not so again let me point out one of the biggest attributes anybody will require in politics is a thick skin in other fields you may not need to have such thicker skin but in politics you do need and another aspect which is different, which is common across professions, including politics and other professions is sheer perseverance you can see examples in politics of people who have been wiped out and have hung in there and later on made a comeback so perseverance is extremely important in politics another things that is very important is street smartness to be shroud to understand people to have EQ (Emotional Quotient) to understand what makes people tick now these are some qualities that I also apply in the corporate and other professions so there are some similarities there so as I said there are some similarities and there are some differences, another difference I would like to point out is that although in corporate world you do have colleagues and you do have groups and you have corporate politics but essentially loyalty cannot trump competence beyond the certain point if the corporate chieftain were to only have loyalist and not care about competence it's going to come to grief very quickly whereas in politics competence is often sacrifice in favour of loyalty and that doesn't seem to cost as much in the short term because politics is so much about personalities and so much about branding of an individual or a party that even short term lack of competence down the chain of command may not make a dent, it will make a dent in the long term for sure.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The point Jay makes about loyalty and competence is an interesting one. In a corporate context, you don't need to solve for having a voice on the table. If you are a CEO accountable to the shareholders, then you just have to focus on solving for commercial outcomes (not that it's any easy). But in a political context, you need to first solve for having a voice on the table (which is keep your popularity intact) and subsequently demonstrate performance and that could be a profound mind-set shift that one has to go through in terms of how you think about what you say and what you do.

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End of nugget transcription

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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