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Context to the nugget conversation

Sukhinder speaks about the myth of the hero's journey that often goes along with several successful people. She also goes on to say that we think we make a few clean choices which drive our outcomes but it is a lot of the micro-choices that determine the shape of our journey. She speaks about some of the small choices and micro-risks that shape our destiny.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And picking up from there Sukhinder, you talk about the myth of the single choice and you actually say that, good careers are actually a result of a number of micro choices and smart risks people take. Just talk to us a little bit maybe in the context of your journey, if you could give us a sense of what do you mean by these micro risks.

Sukhinder Singh Cassidy (SC): Sure. Well, I think the point in the book is that from outside and again and from the media, we have this idea of the hero's journey. And even our own memory sometimes fails us that what we extract from other people's journey and remember our own is often like the single big choice, which maybe in hindsight, may be it is easier to identify one choice that was disproportionately important or what have you. But the problem is that it is through abstraction or through hindsight that you may be able to deduce or imagine one choice. The problem is going forward through your life, it is about making choices and it is the practice of continually choosing, like being in a feedback loop with yourself essentially throughout your career, not with the product, not with the company but with as yourself. And that often unlocks each next possibility. It is the choosing and choosing and choosing again. And some of these choices are smaller, some of them are bigger. And so while everybody else may remember the one, the reality is it was not the one, it was several and the several was the 10 and the 10 was the 20. And so it is not about the size of one single risk, it is about the frequency of risk-taking and the commitment to a journey of continuously choosing, including choosing through failure. We think that the failure happens and we stop. Well, actually, it does not. What happens is people keep choosing and then they reach their next cycle of growth. And obviously, my career is probably part of where I took inspiration from. I am not an academic. I am a practitioner in business. In my career, I counted 23 different choices to become the CEO of a large multibillion dollar company. And some of them were micro with outsized returns, some of them were macro that created large failures and some were macro choices that resulted in almost nothing at all, certainly not the impact I expected. So, for me, it was the practice of continuing to choose and some was often with unexpected results.

DJ: And maybe if I could pick up from there. You spoke about 23 choices if you maybe forced ranked them in the decreasing order of what people are likely to miss, you know, some choices are obvious, you go to B school, that is an obvious choice, you need to decide. But I am sure there is a realm of, in

the book when I read it, there were a bunch of things that probably is not even in people's awareness that it is a choice, could you talk a little bit about those vital few which are worth bringing back to warrant our awareness?

SC: Sure and I am happy to talk about two or three or four from the book that kind of highlight, what illustrate this point. One unobvious choice was I left Google at the pinnacle of my career to become the CEO of a startup that was, you know, and at the time I was running Asia Pacific and Latin America for Google, it was a multibillion dollar business, I was certainly on track to be a Fortune 50 or 100 CEO if I wanted that path (00:04:53). And what I really wanted to do was to prove I could build and scale another company and be the CEO then, and I wanted to go to a new area of innovation in e-commerce. And so I walked away from a very large job to become the CEO of a startup. And that choice failed when measured by the next six months. And I say this to people and like six months later, I was in a battle with the founder and he wanted the company back and he won. I mean he said to Board I want to be CEO again and the Board was pretty quick to oust me in favor of him despite the fact that my resume, my accomplishments, all of that was quite large. So if you measure that choice 10 years later, I pivoted in e-commerce, I became a CEO, I thought that would be the company I would be running as a multibillion dollar company and ended up with the choice. The number of choices I had to make subsequently continued to double down on this idea of being in e-commerce. I decided to start another company in e-commerce and I became an investor, I became a Board member in e-commerce, I just doubled down on that thesis. I mean I loved the last 10 years of my life as being in charge. And I ultimately ended up running Stub Hub, which was another multibillion dollar e-commerce opportunity. But I just did not get there the way I thought. So that is one example. Another unobvious choice I moved to Silicon Valley in 1997. By the way, I did not think I was making the grandest of the choices. I thought I was making a choice to go in a place with really good whether that had good entrepreneurs. I did not know how to be an entrepreneur but I thought I wanted to be, I did not have an idea. And literally, I fell in love with the weather and the idea that there were people who were starting companies but I could not, by scale of imagination, have imagined how good the timing was of that choice relative to the growth of the internet, just where it was in its inflection point. So it gave me many many many opportunities to succeed and many to fail. But honestly, what do we call that term in the U.S., it is like shots on goal, like too many shots on goal, you can fail one and there would be another good shot on goal just right around the corner by virtue of putting yourself in the environment with tailwinds bigger than you imagined. So it was maybe an unobvious choice. I quit my job and I thought of making a micro choice, not a micro choice. I was like, there is not that big a risk, I was only responsible for myself. I had some money in the bank. I did not find a good job in California. I could always go home to my parents in Canada and live with them. This was a small risk but with outsized returns. That is an example in the opposite direction. Those are just a couple, I mean there are many more.

DJ: Another piece, if I may pick an example that stayed with me, I think very early on in your career, you talk about I think some bank, which says, maybe, we will consider you in the future and you take that as an opportunity rather than a rejection and you call them and then it turns into an internship or something like that.

SC: Oh yeah, that is the pretty, yes, it turned into my first job. I definitely was trying to become an investment banker on Wall Street and I failed it. I failed to get the job after many many interviews and almost a year of trying and I think what you are referencing is. They sent me a quasi-rejection letter. And Merrill Lynch, which did recruit in Canada but arguably one of the biggest investment banks in the world, I applied and they had said, if you are in New York, we will be happy to give you a 15-minute informational interview, which was a very polite rejection letter and my father was the one who said, hey, buy a train ticket and go, take them up on that offer. They might be rejecting me but I will still show up to say, I am actually going to be in New York, I will come and see you and I did.

And that converted into a three-hour interview and that converted into an offer after a year of getting rejected through all the traditional processes. So yeah, yet another risk that may be that worked out in ways I did not imagine. But it was kind of continuing to choose possibility that led to that opportunity.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Thank you for listening. For more, please visit playtopotential.com

End of nugget transcription

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the 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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