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Context to the nugget

Ashish speaks about how he had told himself that he would like to turn entrepreneur when he is 30 and do something else when he is 45. He speaks about how these markers influenced the way he made choices and spent his time and attention when he graduated at Harvard Business School and beyond.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I think moving forward in one of the other conversations, one of the things you said really struck a chord with me. You talk about having markers in your head when you were at Harvard Business School, you said, you talk about the fact that you told yourself I will turn entrepreneur when I am 30; I will turn a philanthropist when I am 45 and so on. But before we speak about these specific markers you set for yourself, talk to us a little bit about this concept, may be elaborate a little bit on how it worked in your head and maybe also as you look forward, how do you think about these markers as you think about your journey as you look ahead?

Ashish Dhawan (AD): Yeah, so, I think, it came from my reading in a sense and I have always believed in having role models, both big and small; small one being more friends who you interact with every day, they are like mini role models where there's one thing they do much better than you or much better than everybody else and you can learn from them and then there are the sort of bigger role models who inspire you and provide you with some direction. And one of my role models always was Benjamin Franklin. I mean, when I read his autobiography I was sort of naturally attracted to him, because he was a largely self-taught person, he was in business, ran a printing shop for many years but had multiple interests and really then cultivated those interests later in life, had a second career outside of business, was a scientist, was obviously father of the constitution, so had a political life to some extent and contributed towards nation-building but also had sort of other esoteric interests, he was one of the founders of the University of Pennsylvania, he was the founder of the American Philosophical Society. So, again, as I mentioned earlier, my grandfather was somewhat of a polymath and had multiple interests. He wrote Urdu poetry and loved math and still did math on the side even as he ran a business and, on the side, he ran a chain of schools which was his sort of philanthropic endeavour or his love for education. So, I think this idea, I think, from maybe these two individuals: one close to me in flesh and blood and one who I had read about and I was very inspired by, you know, this idea got set in my head that maybe I don't need to be fixated. I saw my dad, my dad was like a journey, you know, company man. One of those Japanese company journeymen, you know, he worked, he is a chartered accountant and then he worked for the same company for 25+ years and then worked with one other individual for the rest remaining years of his productive life. And I know a lot of people switch jobs today, but they really are sort of doing more of the same thing going forward in a sense running the rat race on the treadmill and I thought that maybe being

inspired by these individuals Ben Franklin and my grandfather that having multiple careers would be more exciting, it would push you to get outside your comfort zone, to challenge yourself again, put you on a new trajectory, rejuvenate you. And so, I think these markers were helpful because I think you need a minimum of 10 to 15 years to achieve something in one career, and I am fairly achievement-oriented, and so, I was finishing business school when I was about 28-years-old. So, 30 was the natural first marker because I had worked a couple of jobs before business school, I was going to work one more but I was very clear that I wanted to be an entrepreneur. So, by setting a marker at 30, it forced me while I was at Harvard Business School to start actually working on my new venture which was a private equity fund and doing things, I found my partner there, I started preparing, building the network etc. And then because I had a marker at 45, even though I was in a corporate job, I was running this private equity fund, I started cultivating these other interests, I started sitting on a couple of other non-profit boards when I was in my mid-30s and then by the time I was 40, I had already started thinking very seriously and made the decision and then actually by 42-43, I managed to exit the corporate world. So, I think, having this big role model but also having a sense that it takes at least 10-15 years to make a meaningful contribution, that's how I came up with these markers in a sense.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: It is interesting to hear Ashish speak about it taking 10-15 years to make a meaningful contribution in any space. This reminds me of my conversation with Chandramouli Venkatesan, an earlier guest at the podcast. He unfortunately recently passed away due to cancer. He spoke about the notion of learning cycles and how we all need to ensure that we should participate in a few learning cycles each of which spans a few years. Do look up my conversation with Chandramouli if this is of interest. You can find him in the Guests section at playtopotential.com.

End of nugget transcription

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Ashish Dhawan - Nuggets

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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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