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## Context to the nugget conversation

Ravi speaks about some of the choices he has made post his corporate career spanning Cummins and Microsoft. He speaks about how he has thought about the portfolio of things that he has architected and how the portfolio has evolved over time. He also discusses how one could think about doing one thing versus pursuing a portfolio.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Before we get into the book Ravi, one of the questions I am curious about in the work I do and in the podcast is how people think about their pie chart of time and attention and if we sort of go back to that point where you moved away from your full-time role at Microsoft to today, can you talk a little bit about some of the key choices you have made along the way, specifically, I think, even in the book you call out a couple of things you said no to but I am curious about how you have thought about choices in that span.

Ravi Venkatesan EP2 (RV): So, when I was leaving Microsoft and one of the choices, I made at that time is not to immediately plunge into one more thing just like this. I had very little idea of what I wanted to do. There was some sort of thoughts, but nothing really fleshed out. And the only thing I was clear and determined not to do was to become an employee again with a full-time job and all that goes with it, pluses and minuses. I remember talking to Nandan Nilekani at that time who has been a friend and mentor over the years and he said the fundamental choice you have to make is whether you want to do one thing or you want to do multiple things. So, okay. I said, but look right now I want to try many things, because and I write about that in the book, which is when you come to a fork in the road and you don't know what to do, then it is very important to try micro experiments, lots of little things and then see what fits and that's what I began in 2011-12. And so, I would say that when I looked back, the pie chart of my time back then looked like quite a few corporate boards. So, Infosys and then there was Volvo, and Bank of Baroda and those sorts of things and that took up probably 70 percent of my time. I began my experiments in the social sector starting with Social Venture Partners, and then with a friend Will Poole we started Unitus Ventures. So, those kinds of experiments. I joined the board of Rockefeller in 2014. So, I would say those things took about 10-15 percent of my time and then my previous book and then the writing effort was the balance. Now, by 2018 is when I think I made the next big pivot when I said, look, the social sector stuff you can't really hope to make any difference unless you are all in, you are really committed. So, I made the big shift to dial down the corporate engagement and dial up the commitment to the dev sector. And so, today the pie chart of my activities is probably about 70 percent development and social sector, about 20 percent is right now with the book project and the corporate engagement is very, very small largely with Hitachi.

DJ: Hmm. And back to your advice from Nandan who has also been on the podcast in the past, the one big thing versus portfolio given your lived experience and the conversations you have with leaders who are going through this transition after having accomplished a lot of things in life, any guiding principles on what kinds of people are better off with a one big thing and what kinds of people are better off going down the portfolio are out?

RV: It is an interesting question. I think as you correctly have surmised, there is no right answer. It is, you know, what fits. But I do think that as you get older so as you cross late 40s, 50, I think it is a little constraining for most people to just do one thing. After 50, even though we are living longer lives Deepak, there is a lot of uncertainty and so you need to start optimising for the thing that is most precious which is time. And so, if you approach this saying look, I have now a much more finite amount of time left and how do I want to spend it, how do I want to optimise it so that when I look back, I won't have regrets, I doubt you would choose to do just one thing. So, I would say the answer is very different when you are in your 20s and 30s where you still have that drive to achieve the achievement orientation and achievement is very much correlated with focus and intensity and so forth. So, the second mountain if you will I think is generally better supported by having a portfolio of things that engage you. That's my sort of surmise anyway, and I also think that there is a certain joy that comes with being more in control of your time. So, the fact is today I am not feeling very productive, I am not going to write, I am going to do something else. I am going to read or I am going to take off somewhere or whatever. Or today is Sunday, but I am feeling very, very productive so I am actually going to just do whatever I need to do. This freedom and flexibility I think is ultimately where you want to be rather on a treadmill where somebody else has the hand on the control, and so that also suggests that you are better off with an array of things.

DJ: It's a great point of autonomy and control as we age.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This reminds me of a very compelling TED Talk by Dan Pink back in 2009 on motivation. He speaks about how, If Then Else rewards stop motivating people after a certain point especially for complex roles. He goes onto say that three things matter in what we do – We seek Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose. I feel that while the corporate role can provide Mastery and Purpose, Autonomy can be hard to come by and I guess it begins to matter more and more as we go through life. As an aside, I recently spoke to Dan Pink on his recently published book on The Power of Regret and look forward to publishing it in the coming weeks.

## 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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