

## Jyoti Sarin Transcript

((Music))

My name is Jyoti Sarin and I inspire and enable innovation at Cisco. *((Music fades))*

One thing I'm passionate about is really creating an exponential impact. The ability for a leader to let go of control a little bit, and to really allow their team, their organization to take vision, add onto that vision, and make it bigger.

One of the lessons I've learned in my life is when you lead a group of people, and you drive your top-down agenda, you really have a group of spectators. You have a group of people who are waiting on hearing what you have to say, and then they go execute. However, when you bring them along, and you make them a stakeholder in a decision, you turn those spectators into actors. And then they become an equal shareholder of your idea. And the impact is exponential.

But you have to understand that to be an exponential leader, you have to know how to follow as well as lead.

*((Music fades up))*

When I started my journey, well I was a very typical manager. *((Music fades out))*

Of course, I went through the whole, I need to command respect by power, I need to make sure my idea gets taken forward, I need to make sure that my team sees that. But over a period of time, as I've come to realize that my team, my organization has only made my ideas better, there has been an internal insight, or you can say learning, that has helped me understand that when we have the ability to have 100 different ways to realize a vision, or to perhaps overcome a hurdle, we're ultimately maximizing our chances of success. We're giving 100 options, and probability is, one of them is going to be brilliant.

I took two servers and one guy to start what we called an innovation lab. And six years

later we have an innovation and research center that helps all over 10 organizations across the company in achieving their innovation goals.

I think the crowning moment in our achievement has been where we've seen a bunch of programs and sales like the Cisco Barbarians program, the Street Smart program come to life from scratch to where it's, you know, going to all of Cisco worldwide sales organization and really helping them harness the best of their employees' ideas.

*((Music fades in))*

Let me say that in a really large corporation *((Music fades out))* because we're really geared towards managing chaos, we have created structures which are hierarchy-driven. But that also creates a lot of silos, you know, within an organization, I have an MBO, and I want to drive that. Innovation happens within those silos.

What we're trying to do is we're trying to maximize the impact by connecting these ideas across silos. Innovation has to happen with no boundaries, no silos because it helps us drive a higher throughput of ideas, more exchange of resources, and that's what we're looking for. We're looking for an open flow of ideas across boundaries, across silos, and creating what I call the network model of innovation. Cisco knows how to do network. We are building the human network. Now we need to build the network of ideas.

It is risky and daunting to allow this organic idea generation you never know if you're going to get the right kind of ideas. And perhaps that's one of the biggest hurdles when people are starting to think about organic innovation.

You don't have 100% success. The 100 paths that you went down will ultimately lead you that one path that's extremely important to follow. And hence, we have to face our fear of failing, or you can say, get really happy with the process of learning.

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*((Music))*

There is a place for democratization of talent and ideas. There is innovation happening all around us. *((Music fades))* Can we really drive that just with top-down direction? And never having inputs from the edge of the company into that strategy, into that innovation strategy? In my humble opinion, it's not possible. I really think that we have to balance the top-down direction with the bottoms-up creativity of employees.

*((Music))*

You cannot be every 100% sure that you are on the right path. *((Music fades))* But the important thing is to understand that when you have the agility, the nimbleness to change course, to be adaptive, to bring people along, to keep making sense of your environment every step of the way, that you are sometimes course correcting.

Was I ever sure that we were heading in the right path? Perhaps not. Did I ever know I could really have 10 different use cases for one thing we're building? Never. But because we were nimble, because we were listening, because we really valued everybody's ideas, that we're able to actually create something even more rich. So really the bottom line of what I'm trying to say is you sometimes don't want to be 100% sure.

You don't want to write your destiny in such solid letters that you can never ever change it. Because sometimes things that you did not take into account may be the things that you really want to do.

So I think I'm not afraid to take the road less traveled, and perhaps with very less visibility, and see what the future holds.

*((Music up))*

I am Jyoti Sarin, and I make amazing things happen.

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