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StoryCorps @ RSAC Podcast Transcript  
Episode 4: "There Is a Way to Win This"  
Niloofer Razi Howe & Asheem Chandna, April 7, 2016

NARRATOR: Welcome to the RSA Conference 2016 StoryCorps podcasts. Please enjoy this discussion between friends and colleagues Niloofer Razi Howe, senior VP and Chief Strategy Officer, RSA, and Asheem Chandna, Partner, Greylock Partners. Asheem begins the conversation.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: So tell me about yourself.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: So born and raised in Iran.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Okay. Wow.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: And then when I was 11 years old I moved to the U.S. by myself.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Wow.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: So we all eventually made it to L.A., or as we call it Tehran-geles.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Wow. Okay.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: What about you? Where did you grow up?

ASHEEM CHANDNA: I grew up in Bombay, India and I came to Canada when I was 17.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: Did you know you were going to be a venture capitalist?

ASHEEM CHANDNA: I had no idea I was going to be a venture capitalist, because it's, you know, very much an accidental career for me.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: So what are those lessons that -- the lessons that seem universal in your years from operating through investing?

ASHEEM CHANDNA: As opposed to being it's all about the money, right, it's really about the mission and if you're true to the mission and you do high quality work the money will follow. So, you know, as opposed to - so that's one piece. I'd say another piece is probably... I'm a big believer in intellectual honesty, you know, so it's one thing to market something to the

marketplace, but, like, within the room, you know, being intellectually honest. So that's probably like, I'd say another lesson. Maybe another one is I would just say at the end of the day business is about people. And so I'd say, like, a lot of the hard decisions are actually people decisions and not everybody's willing to take those on.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: So I'm in a big company but I call myself a big company entrepreneur.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Uh huh.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: I think that's intellectually honest.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Huh, yeah. [LAUGHS]

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: Because we have an entrepreneur running the place.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Yeah, big companies can be entrepreneurs, sure.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: So I was, um, in the LA office for McKinsey.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Okay.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: And I was a generalist so I did technology, healthcare... media entertainment. I did the computer industry as well. And when 9/11 happened my husband I both sort of woke up and said what can we do?

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Yeah.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: Uh, we want to - we both want to do something.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Sure.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: And so when they called I was, like, wow, I get to serve the country in something I know how to do... And my belief was at the time that, um, what the Internet was to the retail industry, right, a complete disruption - 9/11 was to the security industries.

I've known Amit Yoran, who runs RSA, for a long time, and Amit, when he came to run RSA he, you know, he and I started talking and eventually in the context of the Dell acquisition, the largest tech acquisition in history..

ASHEEM CHANDNA: [OVERLAP] Yeah.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: ...uh, it was a pitch to bring a strategy person to the table who could really help think through the security strategy piece of it. And finding great people to work with and problems that are intellectually challenging where you feel the mission and you feel it in your teeth.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: [OVERLAP] Yeah, sure.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: You're having fun?

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Yeah so I mean, I enjoy the people I work with that, you know...

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: [OVERLAP] Right.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: ...I've never considered it work.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: I, um, whenever I talk about women in technology, which is something I care a lot about...

ASHEEM CHANDNA: [OVERLAP] Yeah.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: ...um, the issue of work life balance comes up and my answer is there's no such thing as work life balance.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Yeah.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: It's just making it work for you.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Exactly.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: Do your children, I mean do you talk to them about your work?

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Our son, you know, since our son's 15 years old, I think he has a pretty good understanding of what I do.

I mean, I think, uh, like, I don't know how you guys deal with the internet at home, and we still struggle with that and then the texting and, you know, all that stuff. There's a whole set of challenges around that, and I think on the flipside the opportunities are amazing.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: I think, you know, it comes back down to what it's always been, which is you have to teach your children how to think through these issues they face.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: And knowing how to think and, you know, being able to understand somebody else's point of view as well and being able to reason. You know, they're just some building blocks and if you actually can, you know, develop those you can kind of do well in whatever you're doing. On the other hand if you don't develop those it actually, you know, it...

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: [OVERLAP] I agree with that. It's a language [STAMMERS] and, uh...

ASHEEM CHANDNA: [OVERLAP] So...

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: ...just like math is a language...

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Yeah.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: What are you most excited about when you think about tech and the future of tech? Like what are the things that are fascinating to you right now?

ASHEEM CHANDNA: I would say, you know, the application of AI and how that's going to change people's lives, right. And so for example, like, let's say within our lifetimes are, you know, self-driving cars actually really going to become on some level of being mainstream.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: [OVERLAP] Which camp do you fall in? There's the Ray Kurzweil AI is awesome and then there's Hawking's it'll be the end of humankind, so...

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Yeah. I think, I probably fall, fall more into the former piece, which is it's awesome, but it probably means that I actually haven't thought about all of this stuff at a very detailed level, because I think, I mean, I've had people pose scenarios at me, like, oh I'll give you one really quick one around self-driving cars. Like, so if the software in the car, in the future the car's driving itself and if the car knows that, uh, you know, if it goes, it's going to go either left or right. If it, if it veers to the left, you know, it's going to kill a set of people outside the car, if it goes straight or veer to the right it's going to kill you inside the car. So how is the software going to make that decision?

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: Right.



ASHEEM CHANDNA: Or you could say, hey, you know, you're sitting in the car, you're 70 year old and if you do a certain action let's say you're going to kill kids. So there's all these societal questions, right?

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: Holy cow.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: So and yeah some of the stuff actually probably is going to, you know, will play out at some level.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: Have you ever read or listened to Nick Bostrom?

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Uh, no, yeah.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: He's the Cambridge University professor.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Oh okay.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: He does a lot of the scenario - he walks through a lot of the scenarios of how AI can go haywire.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Yeah, uh-huh.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: And it's, it's really, it, it's fascinating and terrifying and...kind of makes you realize that you have to - you do have to think it out ahead of time, right?

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Yeah.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: This is one system where you can't kind of just see what happens.

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Exactly, exactly.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: What about the - what about as you think about AI and security by the way? Is that a good thing? Is that a scary thing? Is that...

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Is this going to eventually head to a good place and get solved or is this going to be open ended for many, many years?

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: I believe we're going to solve the problem. We're not in a good place right now. There's no question about it and we're losing. Offense is winning and defense is losing

today. But it may be the case that we're playing different sports, right?

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Yeah.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: So, um, we just...there's a way to win this, but it's going to require us to rethink a lot about our systems and our architecture and what we are actually trying to protect, right? Are we just trying, you know, are we trying to protect the entire enterprise or are we just trying to protect the most critical assets in the enterprise?

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Yeah.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: What do we mean by privacy? Should we be creating this much data?

ASHEEM CHANDNA: Yeah, uh-huh.

NILOOFAR RAZI HOWE: So I think there's a new way for us to think about how we live in a post-perimeter, um, world where everything - you have to assume everything's going to get out there if it's connected to the internet. And so I think if we

actually put, put time and energy and talent into that we will solve the problem. Without question.

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