

The Human Conversation

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Get To Know Our Guest
**ASHISH
SENSARMA**

Ashish Sensarma is a Growth Architect - Apparel, Beauty & Fitness

With over 30 years of experience in the apparel industry, Ashish built and scaled consumer brands across continents-driving growth through branded retailing, multi-channel distribution, and a deep understanding of global consumer aspirations. From launching Mexx's retail business and expanding it to 300+ stores across Europe, to elevating Vilebrequin into a global leader in luxury swimwear, ***his journey has been defined by strategic vision, operational excellence, and a passion for brand storytelling.***

As an Indian-born Dutch national, he brings a multicultural lens to leadership and brand development. ***His expertise lies in controlled distribution, cross-border expansion, and building high-performance teams that deliver results.*** Ashish holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (Finance) from Nichols College, and continues to thrive on transforming ideas into global success stories.

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HIGHLIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

- **KG:** *You've had such an incredible career, a C-suite leader, an entrepreneur, board advisor, investor, just to name a few. Is there a red thread that ties all of this together? Is there a driving force behind all that you do?*
- **ASHISH:** *Initially, India gave me a lot of grounding of who I am, especially in terms of my personality and things like that. And then I was really blessed, I would say is the right word. I worked for a company called Mexx. That was the start of my career. And there I met leaders. I listened to them. I observed them. And a lot of what I am today is those early years of foundation.*
- **ASHISH:** *As I moved along with life, I learned more things. I got introduced to more people. So it's always been a journey of learning from people. And when you ask me my red thread, 3 things. It's always been for me about brands. I believe that brands have a huge responsibility in the world today. That's one.*
- **ASHISH:** *Second is about people. We are in the people's business, this is the people's business. And what ties this all together is for me the culture in which we operate. And when I talk about culture, I talk about working with people who are passionate.*
- **ASHISH:** *To answer your question in a concise three words, culture, brands, and people. Without that, I think the world is not very, you don't get very far. So that's the red thread, which has always been my, whatever I'm doing, it's about that. Is this a branded business? Is there a purpose for this brand? How are the people in this business? It's a people's business. And what is the culture that this business is all about?*

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- **KG:** *What do the terms ethics and integrity mean to you?*
- **ASHISH:** *Ethics for me is all about where we come from. The ethics I've been talking about myself as an individual. I learned my ethics from my parents. Those are ethics which I learned. It's the environment of people. There was no thing as right or wrong. It's about understanding what you felt was right and what you felt was wrong.*
- **ASHISH:** *Integrity for me is what do you do with all this? What do you do with this? It's this theory that you've learned all your life. How do you put it into practice? And that's a tough call. It's not easy because there's so many forces at play. And as the world is moving forward, as the world evolves, there are more challenges, more discussions, more priorities and it's tough out there.*
- **ASHISH:** *Ethics for me is more about theory. It's like a map and integrity is like driving a car. Are you able to do it?*
- **ASHISH:** *Integrity is about doing things when nobody's watching. Integrity defines you as a person. It defines your personality. It defines your purpose. It defines you as a brand.*
- **ASHISH:** *The world doesn't allow you too many mistakes. So if you do wrong things, the world doesn't remember all the good that you did. The world only remembers all the bad things you did. Integrity is a tough one because you've got to be very consistent.*

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- **KG:** In all of the things you've done, huge organizations you've created and led, have you felt that there was a change in the way you looked at ethics and integrity for yourself as an individual versus when you have your organizational hat on where you now have huge teams, huge numbers of people and organizational needs to worry about too, not just your own ethics and integrity. Were they different for you or did they all feel roughly the same?
- **ASHISH:** You can make life very complex. You can make life very simple. And I have always said, anytime you are confronted with issues and problems, go back to your culture and to your DNA and you will find the truth in there.
- **ASHISH:** *People accuse me that I talk a lot and I do. And the reason I talk is I love to communicate with people. I love to communicate with my teams. Whenever I've had the opportunity to lead people, lead teams, it's about transparency.*
- **ASHISH:** *Ethics and integrity is not about a blame culture. You cannot talk from two sides of your mouth. So if you believe in transparency, you believe in responsibility, you believe that you are there for a particular purpose, do your job, not somebody else's job.*
- **KG:** *Consistency in a leader where the leader is very clear about their own values and they're consistent about it. Transparency, honesty, keeping your value system close to your heart in how you operate and ensuring people understand that.*
- **KG:** What are the biggest challenges that business leaders have to grapple with today?

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- **ASHISH:** *Everything for me is about branding. Today's leaders are faced with short-term versus long-term. There's so many challenges with short-term priorities.*
- **ASHISH:** Today's leaders are really, I think confronting with that. We hear the word sustainability, we hear the word climate control, we hear the word world's pollution. I would say this dilemma of this constant need for growth, constant need for growth that I need to keep on growing my business.
- **ASHISH:** It's a lot of it is about creating products which last for a long time. It's about creating products which are transparent in terms of pricing. It's about creating products which are less about creating pollution. But how can we produce less without compromising growth?
- **ASHISH:** *It's about brands which create a country's ethos. If you think about our country where I originally came from, India, brands are about creating those kinds of perception about what a country is all about. It's not about creating. It's about curtailing supply. It's not about continuously supplying all the stuff. Find a way to stop the demand, find a way to it.*
- **KG:** *What's your advice to professionals on how to build cultures of integrity in their teams and organizations as they grapple with competing priorities and diverse stakeholders?*
- **ASHISH:** *It always starts with the leader. You've got to set the example. So that's the starting point. Do the leaders of the organization or even in the family or even within your friends, do you set the standards for it? Are you the example? You've got to start with that.*

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- **ASHISH:** It's about really walking the talk and saying, if this is integrity, what should we be doing? And that is a dialogue, which is not a one-time dialogue. It's a nonstop dialogue, 24-7.
- **ASHISH:** *One point is you're starting with your own leadership. Secondly, I always equate things not to organizations. Organizations for me are like a human being. They evolve. And next one after transparency is you need to have at least traceability and transparency in this.*
- **ASHISH:** *What I mean by transparency and traceability is that do companies have a clear role and responsibility defined about what you're supposed to do? What are your do's and don'ts? And I call it the cultural do's and don'ts. That defines you.*
- **ASHISH:** *Before we go all gung-ho and start hiring people, think the first thing we need to define is what is our cultural values? Because whoever we're going to bring in is going to come into our family. And that person has got to live the values which we are talking about.*
- **ASHISH:** *Let's find the commonality about what drives us. What is it that basically builds this community of people who are focused on doing the right things?*
- **ASHISH:** The one which I have been exposed to again from the next days is something known as, *can you reward integrity.*
- **ASHISH:** *When I talk about rewarding integrity, it's not about the what or the you know, it's about the how. How do you get there?*

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- **ASHISH:** *Integrity is all about, there is a purpose in how you do things, but how do you get there is the bigger challenge. And can you do that ethically? Can you do that with real purpose? What I call a clear, it's like taking a thread and you can put the needle through the thread, understanding that origin of DNA of what you are. And if you do that, I guarantee you, you are going to be very truthful to the world and to yourself.*
- **KG:** *What excites you these days in terms of the future of the industry?*
- **ASHISH:** *This is a million dollar question. Now comes Bob Sheard. He's done work for 250 brands. And he's written a new book called *The Brand New Future*. He came out and told me, I've always believed about this brand and continent. He is 100 % convinced about it. He talks about Regenerative Branding. What people have not yet experienced is how do brands actually create experiences from their original product. But yes, keep on growing.*
- **ASHISH:** *We don't have all the answers yet, believe me, but the more I talk to him, the more I discuss with him. And he also is evolving as he moves and he talks to people. So we are in a very live example of doing something which we both are quite passionate about.*
- **KG:** *Do you have a quote, a book, or advice that you'd like to share for people who are looking up to you?*

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- **ASHISH:** I have read a book every few years. It's called *Ikigai*. *Ikigai for people who might not be aware of it is a Japanese philosophy of how to live more happier and more healthier. It's an amalgamation of things what the world needs, what you're good at or you're passionate about, and what you should earn. But the starting point of the whole thing is that you need to find your reason to be.*
- **ASHISH:** A quote which has driven me for many years, it was a quote by Martin Luther King. The quote says *that even when you have an idea, even though the staircase is not clear, follow it. Follow it. Go with the path even though the whole journey is not clear. But if you believe in something, make the first step. Don't wait. If you have that feeling the universe will work with you to make things happen, even though you see half the staircase.*
- **ASHISH:** *Failures are part of human life. It's like a heartbeat. It goes up and down and up and down. If it's a straight line, you might as well be dead.*
- **KG:** *Do you have any tips on how to become resilient? In such a situation, a professional is feeling devastated and so worried for everybody who will also perhaps reap the bad consequences of something that didn't succeed. How can they bounce forward the way you're describing?*
- **ASHISH:** *Everybody's got two arms and two legs. Forget the skin color and the racial diversity. What is common is the mind. Your mind can make you a hero or a zero. Keep your mind, believe in yourself, but go back to your mind and go back to your value system. That is going to be your guiding force, your North Star. Believe in that and the world will conspire to make it happen.*

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- **ASHISH:** *Go back to your value systems. It's all about your value system. What do you believe in? And if things are not going correct with your value systems, don't try and change it. It's not going to work. Things should happen naturally. Don't try and be hard on yourself. Just step back and say it didn't work. There's much more to life. You've got to get 10,000 feet. Ego may not drive you because people hate to accept that they are failed, but you got to be culturally powerful.*
- **ASHISH:** *Faith is taking the first step, even when the entire staircase is not clear.*

REFERENCES & LINKS

- ASHISH's LinkedIn/Website page
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