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## Context to the nugget

We normally think of attention in broad terms but Rich breaks down the various types of attention. He speaks about Attention being the ability to focus our mind on something specific and Meta-Attention being the ability to pay attention to our attention and have the ability to bring it back when it wanders.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): In the book Meng talks about few types of attention one is the distinction between the attention and Meta attention and the other was the difference between the open and focused attention so I was curious with these distinctions. Could you talk a little bit about what these are and more importantly now why should we be cultivating some of these different types of attention?

Rich Fernandez (RF): Attention is simply the directing of your mental faculty to an object of focus our attention and this is something we all of us do every day. But something that was found in the research is that about half the time 47 percent of the time our minds also wander away from what we are doing. So that maybe we may be focused on something specific we also get distracted quite easily on average about half the time. Meta attention, if attention is the quality of directing the faculty of attention or focus Meta attention is becoming distracted and then knowing that you are distracted. In some ways you could say it is attention of attention knowing when your attention has wandered knowing when your mind has wandered and then bring it back the full attention. That's the difference between attention and Meta attention. Focused attention is direct attention is that quality like I said focused directed attention but when we talk about focused attention in the book and in our curriculum, we talk about it as a skill that you can develop. There is a set of exercise you can use to cultivate it and that is simply, it's very similar to meditation you can sit and watch your breathing for example then we use the breathing as an object of attention when we are cultivating focused attention because first of all it's available to everybody and you don't have to believe in anything to focus on it. You can focus on your breath. Studies have shown that when you do focus on your breathing you activate the attention networks in your brain the direct attention networks in your brain. Focused attention is an exercise to cultivate sustained attention over time. Open monitoring as you pointed out is a slightly different exercise there is a quality of attention there but it's not directed it at a single object its actually kind of opened up and directed much more broadly at much more about a noticing the perceptual field. Allowing yourself for example to simply notice what you notice? I am not speaking in riddles. I'm just trying to explain what it means to like notice your own perceptions that is open monitoring? What are you thinking in this very moment? What are you feeling in this very moment? What might physically you be experiencing this very moment? Your attention moves to this entire different factor though out you know moment by moment,

second by second becoming aware of how your attention is shifting and moving is the process of open monitoring.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ This is a fascinating insight. I had never quite thought about attention in these nuanced terms. The metaphor that comes to mind is that of an automobile. Attention is a bit like the engine. This basically is about your ability to direct horse power at something. Meta-Attention is a bit like the steering wheel which ensures that you stay on the right track and if not, you steer the vehicle back to the place where you want to spend your horse-power. While it doesn't exactly capture the point Rich makes, the big takeaway for me is that we often place a lot of emphasis on developing the engine but less emphasis on the steering wheel! If I bring it back to the advisory work I do, I find this to be a bit like the two questions leaders grapple with "where to go and how to grow". One is a steering question; the other is a building horse-power question. If you make wrong steering or directional choices, building horsepower might have limited value!

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## End of nugget transcription

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### **Rich Fernandez- Nuggets**

- 41.00 Rich Fernandez - The Full Conversation
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- 41.02 Rich Fernandez - Origins of SIY
- 41.03 Rich Fernandez - Attention and Meta-Attention
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- 41.05 Rich Fernandez - Benefits of Journaling
- 41.06 Rich Fernandez - Meta-distress and Response-flexibility
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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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