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Context to the nugget

Rich speaks about why we have a negativity bias as a default setting. He traces it back to human evolution and talks about the fact that for us to survive, it was critical to attach a higher weightage to negative signals in the environment than the positive ones. He links it to the criticality of ensuring psychological safety in a team (results of Project Aristotle in Google) to drive business performance.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Moving on to a different theme in the book which really caught my attention and it was Gottman ratio, it's a ratio of positive to negative experiences for a long-term relationship to flourish and I read something like a 3:1 or a 5:1 which sort of says that 1 negative experience wipes out 3 positive experiences there is something to that effect. So, I'm curious to hear about your take on that and therefore what does it mean in terms of how we influence?

Rich Fernandez (RF): Let me just reframe that a little bit because it's a little bit more along the line and we notice negative things in our environment far more readily than we do positive once and that simply because from an evolutionary perspective we have to develop what's called this negativity bias. In other words we had to assess threats in our environment that could harm us and be really good at doing that at a higher ratio than we could the pleasurable once because pleasurable once we could go without but if we fail to assess that's what we could be dead so if fail to notice there was a bear hiding behind that rock we were dead if we walk by a blueberry bush we can find another blueberry bush the consequences weren't as dire. Our brain had become hard wired to notice negative impulses at a rate of a above 3 times as much as positive once so what is that matter in relationships and in leadership it's because people are sort of tuning mostly to bad stuff and so you have to overweight the good so you almost have to reverse the ratio, you almost have to like do 3 time of many positive things to counteract the negative things that they experience. So for children praise, acknowledgement, recognition same with employees. Like recognition is a critical thing for employees how much recognition do we give as a post to criticism, how much praise do we give as a posed to performance feedback and so in the context of the organization and teams its really critical to have a a pretty much positive working environment because then that leads to another wonderful and a very important team effectiveness factor which is physiological safety. Google di a study and they found that the most trop quality of the most effective teams wasn't that they were geniuses but that they had a physiological safety with each other. Project Aristotle correct. This was named because we are greater than the sum of our parts. It's not about individual contribution it's about how we work together as a team and if there is a sense of physiological safety where you can take risk and fail together safely and be supported in having taking a risk and failed and encouraged to continue on. Mark Zuckerberg famously said move fast and break things and learn and that critical piece learn is what is critical here because it's really about taking the risk and feeling save enough to

often fail. In a disruptive innovation economy and failure has to be okay. I live here in San Francisco and we have a whole conference called failure corn. It's all about failure so what do we learn from epic failures, it's really funny but it's actually a really good idea because it allows for a failure to be OK.

DJ: And back to psychological safety, what do good leaders do? To foster a psychologically safe culture in a team in the organization?

RF: They are authentic and so they talk about their own vulnerabilities openly so they have the moral psychological safety as well they have the model being willing to take risk and failing and they have to be open and authentic this is not something that is easy for a lot of leaders, it's not something they teach in business school, this is not something that even intuitive because leaders feel like they have to play a role but think about that term psychological safety. Whose psychology are we talking about? What is psychology? It's about the human psychological makeup, right? And so, it's about being human which means being authentic and sharing those difficulties and vulnerabilities now you don't have to disclose everything about yourself always, but you have the model what it means to be willing to take risk and to fail and to find another solution and to learn what often doesn't help is negative reinforcement. When you are trying to create psychological safety fear, anger, these negative emotional states do not promote psychological safety. I am just going to say that because its true people need to feel safe they need to feel comfortable that they can fail and if you are easing negative reinforcement and fear and criticism it's not going to promote psychological safety not some people can argue you can get better results when I managed through those other things in your calling negative states, it's very true you will get results but they won't be the disruptive breakthrough results, I think that you are going to see at places like Google, where people are googly, it is a challenging environment it's not like people are taking it easy. I am not suggesting that psychological safety is everybody is just relaxing, for the contrary everybody is working super hard they are also taking a really big risk in working on a really hard problems because they feel safe enough to do that they don't feel limited and deal .. by this negative environment that's been created and again that negative environment will get you some results but I would argue not sustainably and not next level results like you are seeing in places like Google.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: In my work with leaders, I often find that this comes up as a big coaching issue especially around the transition from a CXO to a CEO, especially for people in Sales and Manufacturing functions. Several leaders often rise to the top based on functional competence and using a command and control approach to leadership. When they move to the CEO role, they suddenly have to flip the style completely and focus on creating a safe climate in the team rather than pushing the team to the limits.

This phenomenon can also be seen as an organization transitions from a start up to a scale up. One particular leader I was working with was consumed by her vision and worked super hard and energized the team around her to innovate and to stretch the boundaries. While this worked in a start-up mode, as the organization gained scale and there was a team to be managed, board members to handle and alumni to deal with, it required a totally different tact and her earlier intense style of leadership began to break down and started resulting in all kinds of organizational challenges. Just watching out for these inflection points and being prepared for it by being more thoughtful and self-aware is critical to ensure that leaders don't derail at these transition points.

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End of nugget transcription

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Rich Fernandez- Nuggets

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- 41.01 Rich Fernandez - Leadership Development in the Digital economy
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- 41.03 Rich Fernandez - Attention and Meta-Attention
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- 41.05 Rich Fernandez - Benefits of Journaling

Podcast Transcript [41.08 Rich Fernandez - Positivity and Psychological Safety](#)

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- 41.06 Rich Fernandez - Meta-distress and Response-flexibility
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- 41.08 Rich Fernandez - Positivity and Psychological Safety

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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