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Context to the nugget

Tasha speaks about introspecting our way to self-awareness could be a red herring. She speaks about her research where she found that people that introspected often were more anxious, stressed and less satisfied. She makes the distinction between rumination and introspection and speaks about how one could conduct the enquiry when one goes on a journey of introspection.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): What are the challenges in us introspecting our way for self-awareness and secondly how do we be productive in the way we conduct the inquiry?

Dr. Tasha Eurich (TE): We had so many surprises in our research situations where we would collect data and it would literally say the opposite of what I protected we would see and one of the earliest surprises in our whole program was what I thought was a really simple investigation. So we surveyed about 300 people and we asked them how much time you spend introspecting. In other words, kind of pondering the deeper meaning behind our thoughts and our feelings and our motives and then we surveyed them on things like are you stressed are you depressed, are you anxious, are you happy, do you like your job, are you happy with your relationship, do you feel in control of your life and naturally because self-awareness is good I knew that we would find that the more people introspected the better off they be and that was the opposite of what our data showed so we found that people who self-reflected often were more anxious, more stressed, more depressed, less satisfied with their jobs and their relationship there were even less in control of their lives and we are just thinking maybe self-awareness is bad maybe delusion is actually what we wanted to be fostering because it doesn't seem like it make sense and as we started to dig into some of the data we started to discover that thankfully it's not that the introspection in into a self is bad it's just that the way most of us introspect is completely wrong and the best way to illustrate this you know it gone without having two hours to delve into it is to think about probably what the common introspective question is for most people which is the question "Why". So we might be trying to understand why we are in a bad mood you know you could say why am I so upset after that conversation with my co-worker or we might be trying to understand a bad outcome you know like why didn't I get that promotion or we might be even trying to understand why be believe what we believe you know why do I want that promotion but as it turns out those questions not only the do lead us away from true insight about ourselves they give us a false sense of confidence about our knowledge so for example Sigmund Freud was wrong he believed in his work that people could access their unconscious right so like really why am I upset if I just excavate if I just think long and hard and ask that why question I can find the answer. But what has research has shown for decades actually is that no matter how hard we try we can't access so many of those things it's what I mentioned earlier about the behaviour and emotion and knowledge blindness. So, what happens is

we find an answer that feels true even it's wrong so that an example of where I can lead us away from the truth rather than towards it. Another reason why a really dangerous question is introspectively is it has been shown over and over and over to depress us you know you think about like why I didn't get that promotion. If you are not careful you can start asking question where the answers are well because I'm just a fundamentally bad person and who would want to promote me and you can kind of get stuck in I call it the **rabbit hole of rumination** and so what we wanted to do in our study was understand if why is the wrong question what is the write question you know what are these unicorns doing differently than the rest of us and it took us a little while to find this pattern but we discovered that when unicorns introspected they almost never asked why question they asked what questions and at first sight I thought ohh that just a weird sort of fluke or weird nuance but as we started to look into it started to make a huge amount of sense. So, one example would be you are going back to the question why I didn't get that promotion unicorns if they were in that situation wouldn't ask themselves that question. Here is some question they might have asked instead. What did I learnt that can help me be better positioned in the future? Or what can I do to close the gap between you know where I thought I was and where I need to be? Or what support can I enlist from the people around me to help me you know to achieve this goal the next time I set it? Or they are going back to why am I so upset about that conversation with my co-worker they might instead ask what part of that situation did I own or what can I do differently in the future to avoid that kind of conversation with that person and so what we found was asking "What" instead of "Why" really helps us avoid so many of the pit falls of introspection where we you know what excavating for the truth that we are never gone find and we are focusing on our problem and feeling victimized and disempowered. So I think what I have loved about that is a really tangible tool that I think we can take away it seems subtle but the difference is huge and I am speaking from personal experience. I have started to use that as well.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I was recently listening to an interview of Jim Collins, the author of Good to Great, Built to last, Great by Choice. His books have sold more than 10 million copies worldwide. The interviewer asked him about how he spent his day and one of the things he said really struck me. He said that every day as he wraps up a day, he would just write down the 3 or 4 things he got done that day. He says that he would give himself a score between -2 and +2 on how he felt about the day. Just a gut feel. +2 is when you have a great day, -2 is when you have a lousy day and the rest is in between. Jim goes onto say that he does this for a while and then every 3 months or so, he takes a step back and looks at what's going on. He looks at all the +2 days and says what is common to all these days. He looks at all the -2s and sees what the pattern is. I guess the key insight for me here is that when we are too close to a situation, it is difficult to analyse what is going on. It is helpful to collect adequate data (the what questions as Tasha says) for a period of time before we get to the Why question for us to have a meaningful outcome.

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End of nugget transcription

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Dr. Tasha Eurich - Nuggets

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- 49.02 Dr. Tasha Eurich - Self-awareness Unicorns
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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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