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## Context to the nugget

Alan speaks about a “Product” that Bill might have accidentally invented in the way he went about doing his work – The notion of a “Team Coach”. He speaks about how Bill would spend time getting to know the individuals and the overall team to be in a position to be of value to the collective.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And the other thing that really struck me was the notion of a team coach, right? In one of the interviews you or one of the other co-authors mentioned that it’s almost a product that Bill invented that’s worth replicating in other situations. So, I want to unpeel that a little bit. So, talk to us a little bit about how he went about being a coach of a team. So how was it different from coaching an individual No. 1 and No. 2 how did he go about engaging with a team as a whole and what was the rhythm? So, talk to us a little about this notion of a team coach.

Alan Eagle (AE): Yeah, this was something that was really one of the surprising revelations to us that we discovered through during the research on the book and interviewing people and really thinking through Bill’s approach. We think of people commonly think of executive coaching as a one-on-one situation, which it is for the most part and except at least in the work that Bill did here he met with several individuals. He was coaching many different individuals here at Google and each one had thought that he was their executive coach but in fact what he was really doing was making sure that the team was working well together. And so if you think of a team sports coach, whether it be American football or baseball or cricket or soccer, the coach will sit down with individuals and help them work on their game but the coach also needs to observe the team and make sure that the team is working well together and that involves both the stars of the team but also all of the other people in a team that helps the team perform successfully. And so how does one do that? Of course, he would continue to meet a few individuals but he would also observe the team in action. So, a coach, a team coach you are down on field with the team, you are observing the team in action, you are talking to them as the game is on and that’s what Bill would do. So here at Google he sat in on Eric’s staff meetings every week. He wasn’t really a member of the staff. He just sat in on the staff meetings every week and normally he was pretty quiet in the staff meetings, he wasn’t too vocal but he would observe who was happy, who was being heard, who was not being heard and then afterwards he might go to Eric and say, you know, there is something I observed about how your team is working, this particular situation, this person, I don’t think this person really was fully heard or things like that. So, I think this is the difference between... this is the concept which Eric started to claim as one of the new innovations from Silicon Valley, his executive coaching of teams and one thing Bill said a lot is you can’t get anything done without a team and business is a team sport. And that’s really true, we all think of ourselves as individuals and how we are managing our individual

careers and so on but nothing happens without a team in business and so that's what's his approach was to really look at the team.

**DJ: Got it. And maybe just to stick with it Alan if we looked at Bill's pie chart of time, right, the way he spent time at Google. Give us a sense of what that picture looks like. What sort of things did it include?**

AE: You know, I am sort of smiling at this concept of a pie chart of time because if there is anyone who seemed to have 30 hours in a day instead of 24 hours it must have been Bill because everyone we talked to would just speak about his high energy and he worked out like other people, he slept like other people of course but I do think his... because he didn't really have so much this concept of work life balance which is a healthy concept but sort of a dividing line and I think Bill was always building communities and he really genuinely liked and cared for the people he worked with so it wasn't really work versus life. So, his pie chart was just full. He was just talking to people all of time. He did a lot of phone calls at night that sort of thing. So, I don't know that I could really break down time management for him in his time here at Google except I would say it was probably he would go in Eric's staff meetings every week and then he would just meet people one-on-one and especially in the early days when he was first starting at Google he did a little bit of just walking around. There's an old management phrase "management by walking around" which may have been coined at Hewlett-Packard or at least it was used there and that's a concept of going around and chatting with people checking in on them. But I don't know exactly if we wanted to talk about percentages, I don't think I could really accurately portray that.

**DJ: Sure, I was just looking for what are some of the things that he might have done in addition to what executive coaches that works with individuals. I mean you did mention he sat in on meetings.**

AE: Yeah, I have worked with executives' coaches myself and I'll go have a session with the coach and that's it. Then we don't see each other for a few weeks and that's fine and that's highly effective. But what Bill did was he was actually present in the office, he sat in on meetings, he sat in on Eric's meetings, occasionally sat in on Jonathan's meetings, we have an anecdote from Marissa Mayer where he sat in on a couple of her meetings, so again if you are going to be a team coach you need to observe the team in action and not just the individual players.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: It was fascinating how Bill spent a lot of time in meetings and in the corridors to really sync with the nuanced context at Google and some of the other companies he worked with. And that context made a non-trivial difference when it came to being of value whether it was advising Eric Schmidt, Sundar Pichai, Marissa Mayer or any of the other leaders he worked with. When I work with clients, I often tell them that if I only have access to the locker room and not the stadium where the game is happening, then I am working with incomplete information and it is hard for me to make sense of what is going on. I have to decode what is going on through the stories of the leader and the other players in the organization which comes with its own signal distortion and noise. A similar point is made in a different context by Atul Gawande, a well-known Surgeon, Author, Professor and CEO of Haven, the Healthcare Venture started by Amazon, Berkshire Hathaway and JP Morgan to improve Health Outcomes. In his book *Better*, which was published about a Decade back, he speaks about the distinction between the view in a Musical school where you spend 10,000+ hours (with all due respect to Malcolm Gladwell) and get onto the world of performance and you go from there. He contrasts that to the world of Sport where you need a coach all the way to the top. Even a Roger Federer who is considered the Greatest Tennis Player of All Time needs a coach. He speaks about

how he as a surgeon paid somebody (a gentleman called Bob Osteen) to come into the operating room to observe him and critique him, however absurd the idea sounds. He speaks about the small things that Bob observed that were completely in the blind spot of Atul. He talks about External Coaches as an external pair of eyes providing a more accurate picture of the reality. Now, this would not be possible if Bob didn't observe these things first hand in the operating room. So, if you are listening to the podcast and are a coach or working with a coach either for yourself or somebody else in the organization, do pause and ask the question, what access are you providing to the real action for them to form an accurate picture of the reality.

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## End of nugget transcription

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### Alan Eagle - Nuggets

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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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