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Context to the nugget

'You don't rise to the level of your goals but you fall to the level of your systems', says James Clear. He speaks about the fact that goal setting has not found to be a differentiator between performers and non-performers. While Goals give you the broad direction in which you need to swim, systems provide the momentum you need to progress in that direction.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): The other statement that you make in the book which in a way captures the essence of the book right which is you don't rise to the level of your goals; you fall to the level of your systems. I thought that phrase pretty much captures the essence of the entire book. What's the insight here James and how do you see this playing out in organizations that you work with?

James Clear (JC): Yeah, so I think you are right that's certainly one of the core things of the book and that phrase we do not rise to the level of our goals, we fall to the level of our systems what I am really trying to get at with that is the distinction between our desired outcomes and our daily habits because a lot of the time where it's an individual or an organization that I work with when they want to change their behaviour they often start by trying to set a larger goal, let's double revenues quarter or I want to lose certain amount of weight in the next three months or whatever it is and we think well, if I just had bigger goals, if I try and take massive action then I'll get these massive results. But the truth is the goal was actually the easy part and it's also fairly common among people in your particular industry to have the same goals. Like if a 100 people apply for a job presumably every candidate has the goal of getting the job or if 30 teams compete in the league for the same championship presumably every team has the goal of winning the championship. So, if the winners and the losers in that domain have the same goals the goal cannot be the thing that makes the difference and that doesn't mean that goals are useless, goals can be useful for setting a sense of direction, evolving clarity, understanding where you want to focus but once you understand where you want to allocate your attention and energy it's useful to put the goal on the shelf philosophically speaking and focus almost exclusively on the system. I would define the system as the collection of daily habits that you follow and take you toward particular goal. So, ultimately what we are looking for of course is to align the desired outcome, the goal, with a few daily habits, the system but whether you have the goal or not and this is why I think it's so useful to focus on the system, your habits will carry you to a place whether you want them to or not alright? So, I think, like for example, a useful question to ask yourself is can my current habits carry me to my desired future and what you find is that a lot of the time they cannot. If you just keep repeating the same habits that you have today where you end up or you want to end up and what that is getting out, what that is showing you is much more powerful the system is than the goal. Whenever a system runs it inevitably moves towards some destination and what you want is to make sure that that destination

is aligned with this system that you have that your desired outcome and your daily habits are in alignment but if they are not the goal is not the thing that wins. If there is a difference between the system and the goal the system always wins.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This insight reminds me of my conversation with Tasha Eurich (TE), a leading thinker in the area of widening self-awareness. When I asked her about her research, she basically said that the paradox with self-awareness is that when you ask the really intrinsically self-aware people the secret, they are often modest and don't have much to offer. So, she went about studying people who started off in a poor place (who weren't really self-aware) but over time improved their self-awareness. She calls them self-awareness unicorns. She talks about them here.

TE: *"hey made the decision that it was worth the time and energy and sometimes the pains of self-discovery for them to go on that journey and what I loved about that for the rest of us is it shows us that anyone can make that decision and it's definitely hard to make that decision every day and I am a pragmatist I always say that if we can we can decide to be brave or bit wiser more than half the time or probably and really good shape and by the way our unicorns aren't perfect magical human being they are... and imperfect just like all of us are so that was the first thing the other thing I would say is and I am sure we can talk about this more but they had really well defined daily practices to improve their self-awareness so that doesn't mean that they spend ridiculous amount of time developing their self-awareness we actually found that in some ways they spend less time with more benefits if they use the right approach. But things like regularly soliciting feedback from people who want them to be successful and what tell them the truth things like reflecting at the end of every day asking we call them daily check in what went well today? What didn't go so well today and then how can I be smarter tomorrow. But I think you know just as sort of final point of broad brusher what made them different was; they didn't get into a cycle where they were navel-gazing trust to navel gaze. It was very strategic and smart and purpose driven and I think that's important for us to remember because sometimes people see self-awareness just this two daunting to even think about process right where it's like I got to go into deep cycle logical excavation mode for several years it really isn't like that and that was what was so... to me about what the unicorns thought us is it really about those daily practices that faster incremental inside over time."*

DJ: Back to what James says, I guess it is the small things that they did but not the big goals that made the difference.

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End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Tasha Eurich that is referenced: [Self-awareness Unicorns](#).

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James Clear - Nuggets

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- 52.01 James Clear - Journey to studying habits
- 52.02 James Clear - Building habits in the right areas
- 52.03 James Clear - Keeping the identity small
- 52.04 James Clear - Plateau of latent potential
- 52.05 James Clear - Systems versus Goals
- 52.06 James Clear - Building habits with awareness
- 52.07 James Clear - Environment and habits
- 52.08 James Clear - 2 minute rule - the gateway habit

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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