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Context to the nugget

Raj speaks about the link between levels of success and happiness. He goes on to speak about the relationship between happiness and education levels. He mentions that happiness rises till the undergraduate level but not necessarily post that, suggesting that the commercial threshold for us to be really happy is much lower than what we might think it is.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And maybe before we dive into some of these topics Raj, going back to the term what gets measured gets managed, and you talk about some of the people going after extrinsic measures. Let's take money as one of the examples that is easy to measure where you stand. How do you measure happiness and more specifically is it something that... it is more of an inner recognition that you are happy or do people around us notice or both? Give us a sense of how you think about measuring happiness.

Raj Raghunathan (RR): Yeah, so there's a lot of work that got done between I would say in 1980s or 85 or so mid-80s to mid-90s and a lot of the researchers were very interested in happiness, but they were also sceptical as to whether you can really measure it. Like you mentioned money seems much easier to measure, it's quantifiable but happiness seems like a subjective experience. If I say I am 9 out of 10, is that the same thing as if you say you're 9 out of 10 and so on. So, they ended up doing these studies in which they measured happiness through what are called self-reports basically the simplest way to measure happiness is to ask people how happy they are, for example, on a 10-point scale and then they looked at whether those measures that people gave are highly correlated with other measures, other more "objective measures", like for example, looking at levels of serotonin or dopamine or endorphins in your bloodstream or cortisol for that matter, which ought to be negatively correlated with happiness. They also looked at people self-reports versus what other people that were close to these people said about these people's happiness. Let's say I say I am a 9 and if you ask my wife how happy is Raj, if I am not pulling a number out of thin air, I am actually kind of aware of how happy I am, and I am coming up with a number that's actually valid then you would expect to see a higher correlation between my self-reports of happiness and other people, particularly people who are close to me, their reports of how happy I am. You can also look at brain scans, you can look at certain areas of the brain that tend to get lit up so to speak, if it's more active, there's more blood flowing to those parts of the brain, certain parts of the brain are more well developed, the left prefrontal cortex, for example, is more well developed. So, what the research has ended up concluding is that these self-reports are pretty valid. They are quite highly correlated with these more objective measures of happiness than would be the case if they weren't valid. And so, they ended up concluding that the simplest way to measure happiness is also a reliable way to

measure happiness. So, that's how I go about also doing happiness studies. I just measure happiness; I measure people's moods using relatively standardized but simple measures of happiness.

DJ: Got it. And in your work, you actually say that intelligence is possibly not related or possibly borderline negatively correlated to happiness.

RR: Right, I haven't done any work myself on this so I don't claim that I am really knowledgeable about this, but to the extent that I have studied it in terms of other people's research on this, it doesn't seem like there is any correlation between standard yardsticks of intelligence like, IQ, education levels and happiness levels. So, there is a bit of actually qualification here between being uneducated let's say that you did not even go to any school or college and having an undergraduate degree you are going to be happier with an undergrad degree, but beyond it, it seems that it doesn't really help any and in fact getting a PhD lowers your happiness.

DJ: What changed that at the undergraduate level? What's a delta?

RR: What's a delta between uneducated and the undergraduate?

DJ: Yeah, in the sense yeah, is it just the economy you cross or economic hurdle?

RR: Right, so, what are the calls for the change in happiness, yeah? So, I do think that you have more opportunities. So, one thing that we know for sure, this may be the biggest determinant of your happiness is whether you have access to basic needs or not. If you look at the happiest countries in the world, they tend to be countries in which most of the population has access to things like food and a roof over their head and education and medical attention and transportation and so on... basically the countries that we call socialist countries. Finland, which has been number one for three years now in a row, is an example of that. So, I think that education up to undergrad especially compared to somebody who doesn't even have a high school degree, they are going to do better in terms of access to basic needs. So that might be a big reason for it for sure and of course also think of other associated reasons, which is a sense of self-worth self-positivity, the kinds of people that you tend to hang out with who tend to be more intelligent perhaps, better company in terms of being engaging, you are doing better most skilled labour. So, there's just a variety of things that go together with being more educated than just having a high school degree that is going to be positive for you.

DJ: Got it and it's interesting you say that once the undergraduate, after that there is no significant difference between further levels of education.

RR: Right. So, that's what I remember from these studies and I have to say that what is undeniably true here is that there is lots of people who are not just very well educated and are smart, but are also very successful by conventional yardsticks, in terms of fame, money, power, access to resources and so on status and yet are miserable people. In fact, I'd be surprised if every one of the listeners you have doesn't know at least one person like that who is really wealthy, who is really successful by conventional yardsticks and yet to the extent that these people know them really well, they also know that they are deeply miserable and so that is a very interesting phenomenon for me.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Thank you for reading. For more please visit playtopotential.com

End of nugget transcription

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Raj Raghunathan - 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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