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Context to the nugget

Raj speaks about how we could reframe the way we look at negative outcomes. He speaks about the phenomenon where we end up having an intense negative feeling around an undesired outcome but often the intensity wears down over time. He suggests a “reminisce and reflect” exercise that could help us see things in perspective.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And picking up on the other thing you mentioned Raj which is about pursuing flow rather than chasing superiority, you specifically allude to athletes, right and you talk about the fact that their needs to be an intrinsic desire to win but the moment the match finishes and you end up on the other side you need to be detached to the outcome, right? I am curious about how athletes make that switch happen? How do we ensure we give our best up to a point and then suddenly completely flip in case the results don't play in our way? What's your observation there?

Raj Raghunathan (RR): Yeah, so that's... it's a big topic and I don't know how a lot of the athletes who are very good at it do it, hats off to them because obviously they are elite athletes and yet it's not, it's actually not even so much what happens after the game is over. Of course, the gracious athletes are willing to acknowledge that the other player was better and so on but even going from one point, one moment in the match to the next, you really goofed up in the previous point, say in tennis, are you going to be able to now forget what happened and really focus on what's going on in this point right now, that ability to compartmentalize at some level your mind and really get into a deep focus in this moment is a very, very important thing and lots of books have been written about it. This book that I like on this topic is the “Inner Game of Tennis”, I don't know if you have come across this book, wonderful book.

DJ: No

RR: So when you talk about how do you set a goal that you are deeply, deeply passionate about and pursue it with a lot of passion, whim and vigour and enthusiasm, do everything you can to achieve that goal and yet in the moment when the goal is not achieved not wallow in self-pity and misery and you become resilient even at that point and optimistic for the future and maybe you kind of re-engage with that goal and re-pursue it or you change your goal slightly because you know for whatever reason that wasn't achievable or you learn from it and pursue an entirely different goal, how do you kind of go about that. It's a very fascinating topic, and I think that we as Indians are lucky in the sense that we have the Bhagavad Gita, I mean something that we all grew up with and I think that the core message of that at least as far as I understand it right, I am not a religion major or

anything like that by any means but the core message is very much on point right on this topic that you pursue your duties or your goals, whatever your duties are, you try to fulfil them and yet you don't get emotionally affected if you don't achieve your goals. Or for that matter, even if you do achieve it, you don't take a sense of pride, it's not about your ego and you achieved it and you are better than other people. And so, I think therein lies the trick a little bit, that A, when you do succeed it's not a matter of ego and pride and what's called hubristic pride. You maybe are grateful for the fact that you were able to achieve that goal for all the people that helped you out in helping you achieve that goal. So, there's more of a sense of gratitude perhaps that and if you can do that then I think that will be a little bit easier for you to switch when you do fail from wallowing in self-pity to maybe being graceful. But the other thing that is very, very important that I found very useful that I talk about in the book I call it the dispassionate pursuit of passion and maybe I can spend a few minutes talking about it but the idea is that when you do fail it's an outcome that our mind has categorized as a bad thing, as an undesirable thing, but if you were to look back on your life's experiences, I think that you will agree, and most people I have asked to engage with me on this exercise I call it the reminisce and reflect exercise, basically the exercise involves recalling an event that was negative and then asking yourself, how do I feel about it now? And what I find is that if that event that people recall and I have some people recall the event that happened in the distant past, two years or before that or I have some other people recall an event from the recent past two months or within two months and so what I found is that reliably I find this that so long as sufficient water has flown under the bridge that it's two years or more that's in the distant past the negative events are no longer considered as negative. And sometimes they are actually considered a positive thing now. So I have had people say to me things like oh, when I broke up with my girlfriend right after college, that was maybe 13 years back it was like devastating for me, end of the world, but now I am so happy that I did not get married to that person because later I discovered she was completely cuckoo, things like that or I broke a bone when I was in my 12th grade and it ruined my holidays after the 12th, I really wanted to enjoy, I wanted to travel, I wanted to play cricket and here I was stuck in a hospital bed, but you know what because of that now that I think about it, I ended up learning C++ programming because I was lying down in bed and had nothing to do and that's when I ended up discovering that I was truly deeply passionate about software programming. The point is that when we encounter outcomes, we look at it with a very narrow frame of mind and very even narrow-minded frame of mind and we think of that as a negative outcome and we are convinced that it is negative and the fact that we are convinced that it's negative actually makes it more negative or makes it negative when in reality it may not have been negative at all. It may be exactly the thing that you need in order for you to grow and learn and to take advantage of new doors of opportunity that would not have opened up had that negative thing not happened. I'll give you an example from my own life, it is a very trivial one. So, a few months back I was on my way to New York City and I was going to give a talk and it ended up being... I ended up missing the flight because there was a lot of traffic and build up and partly my mistake but I had budgeted about 45 minutes to get to the airport, it usually takes about that time but it ended up taking an hour and a half and I ended up missing the flight and it felt really bad at that point. But I've been talking about this concept of dispassionate pursuit of passion and who knows whether an outcome is good or bad, you might as well think that every outcome is good and that puts you in the best place. In short that's what that is, the concept and so I ended up thinking about it that way and what ended up happening is that on the next flight, eventually the flight that I got, I was actually sitting next to a guy from an organization and we ended up chatting about happiness in the workplace and they invited me over to their organization to give a talk and I am now engaged with their organization for three years in a row. So, this happened about three years back. I might have said three months back sometime back but happened a while back. I ended up doing a series of workshops and consulting gigs with this organization, which has been deeply satisfying for me. So that's the idea that when you do fail, when bad outcomes happen, you might think that that's the end of the world at that point in time and

maybe it's difficult to pick yourself up immediately after it. But if you kind of remind yourself that look, I mean, let me think back on my past negative outcomes, how do I feel about them, and if I don't feel as negative and I think that they in fact helped me learn and grow then why can't this particular negative outcome also turn out the same way later on. And if that is true then at least you can start feeling the glimpses of positivity, you can kind of see the light at the end of the tunnel so to speak rather than being devastated, so that's the idea.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

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

End of nugget transcription

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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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