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Context to the nugget

Jennifer speaks about the fundamental disconnect between the human operating system that has evolved over thousands of years and the current world we find ourselves in. She says that in order to survive in the jungles, we had to cut out complexity, make quick decisions and not over-finesse our responses. But that approach is not going to cut it in the world we are in given the number of moving parts. She also speaks about how our home life has evolved over time and that has led to additional complexity in our lives.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And in the book you talk about... you say that humans are brilliantly designed for older, less connected and a more predictable version of the world and you go on to say that the operating systems that we have through years of evolution is not really equipped to deal with the future that's unfolding. And even if you look at the current situation with Covid-19, that's quite timely? So talk to us about what you have in mind when you say that we don't possibly have the right operating system to grapple with these situations.

Jennifer Garvey Berger (JGB): Well, it makes so much sense, right? We have spent most of human history in spaces where the biggest threats first of all tended to be physical dangers and second of all tended to be from unknown or uncertain possibilities. And like if we saw a new plant, heard a new noise, met somebody from a new tribe, like for most of human history it was these sorts of things. And so the decisions we needed to make are like very straightforward decisions. Do I run? Do I fight? Do I hide and our biology is set up to simplify to cut out nuance so that we can get to this question run, fight, hide as quickly as possible and then be able to engage in that. But this is not a useful approach, if the thing that you are dealing with is a very tricky issue in the boardroom and your brain is still sort of preparing your body to run, fight or hide, like these are not useful responses in the modern world. And you see it's particularly unhelpful for something that is hard for our minds to even get a handle on like Covid-19 where there are so many moving parts and it's so nonlinear and it's so interacting, and none of these things are normal habits for the mind. And so we have to actually evolve ourselves very fast to grow new capacities, to have new habits and also to be a little bit suspect of what we would think of as obvious or the clear solution, because in complexity that's very likely to be your mind playing a trick on you.

DJ: And I would love to explore some of the themes in the book Jennifer but before we dive in I was curious about one of the things you mentioned. You say that there's a lot of discussion around the complexity we face in the work front, but you actually move on to say that the complexity on the non-work front has increased significantly as well. Say more here.

JGB: Oh my goodness. Well, a month or two ago I might have had a really different response to this question. I think that in general our work our home lives are becoming much more complex with working parents, blended families, new sets of pressures on both parents and young people, the pressures of social media and the way they play into our family systems, the reducing of the extended family in villages that used to take care of and nurture young, like all of these things have led to increasing pressure and complexity. Now that so many of us around the world are locked into our homes, I think we are seeing that the line between home and work has literally dissolved right now and we are literally in an entirely new phase where we are all trying to work, to live, to communicate, to socialize, to get our own space, all in a home that we never imagined would have to hold so many different activities. So I think the pressures on our personal lives and right now the blurring or erasing of the difference between our work life and our personal life is just extraordinary.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Over the last few weeks, in my conversations with several leaders across companies, if there is one theme that they are losing sleep over, it is around how they integrate across various domains of life. I like to point them towards the work of Prof Stew Friedman of Wharton. He speaks about 4 domains – Self, Work, Home and Community. I notice that there are a couple of mistakes that people often make in the way they frame the situation.

- First is that they treat it as a 2-piece jigsaw and solve for work and home and ignore self and community. I notice that if you ignore self, then over time you lose your vitality and you could burn out. If you ignore the community piece (which is about caring for people beyond your immediate family and colleagues), you might start feeling hollow and feel a sense of vacuum in your life
- The second is that people often look at these domains as trade-offs and look for ways to balance across these. I feel a better metaphor is that of a flywheel. I think we need to find a way of moving across these domains in a way that we get energy from one and pour it into the next and so on

The one point I would make is that in our normal life, we end up treating these as big blocks (we go to work from say 9 to 7 pm, treat the evenings as home time and weekends as possibly time with self and possibly for some community work. I like to think about the game Tetris where we have to align blocks and twist them around to fit perfectly. I feel the current COVID-19 situation has given us the opportunity to play Tetris with smaller pieces and it is an opportunity to weave these various domains in the way it makes sense for us rather than the artificial constraints we had earlier that said that this is stipulated work time and this is stipulated home time.

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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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