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## Context to the nugget

Jennifer speaks about how we end up giving a lot of importance to our mind and brains and don't listen enough to our bodies. She speaks about how bodily signals around hunger, sleep and anxiety can fundamentally determine the choices we make and the quality of judgments. She speaks about an example where judges were known to be more generous after a meal than before one.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And you spoke about this a couple of times in this conversation and you refer to this in the book as well. You talk about how we connect to our body, you mention that we should treat this as a source of knowledge and support rather than see it as a vehicle that carries us around. Again, I found that super nuanced. Give us the insight here, what can we learn by observing our body and how does that help us become better leaders?

Jennifer Garvey Berger (JGB): I mean there is this way that many of us have been taught over centuries in our cultures and our societies that the mind is the great thing and the body is the source of temptation or misleading data. And so we have learned to not trust or believe what our body tells us and really think that it is the mind that is the most glorious human achievement. Actually, when we look at our psycho-biology, our body is giving us signals all the time that our mind is making sense out very, very quickly and often reacting to without noticing that it was an embodied sensation that we are reacting to. So if we give someone some studies that are greater, like if you give somebody a shot of adrenaline and then you have them meet a stranger, depending on the gender of that stranger they are either likely to be more drawn to that person as a love interest or more threatened by that person as a possible threat or enemy after this shot of adrenaline than they were under normal circumstances and they tend to attribute that to the other person, and they don't attribute that to their bodies in anyway. And so their body is giving them a signal and then they are acting out of that signal without ever noticing that the signal happened. This is very dangerous that we are responding to data by taking action in a way that is completely divorced from our seeing of the data in the first place. So we need to get much more in touch with what our body is telling us. I see leaders all the time and you see their studies about this as well. People who go into meetings hungry because leaders I work with are very busy and they hate all the ideas, like they hate all the ideas on the table, none of the ideas are quite right. Well, is this about the quality of the ideas or is this about the fact that you didn't have time for lunch? Like we don't tend to think oh, my goodness, I hate these ideas because I have no blood sugar and I have no creativity left. But actually this is the way our bodies work. There are fabulous studies of the thing that makes you most likely to get parole when you are in front of a parole board in prison is how close to a break the judges are when they look at your case. If you are right after they ate lunch or breakfast then you are very likely to get paroled, if you are right before it's time for a break or a meal you are very unlikely to get

paroled. And this has nothing to do with the merits of these cases. This is completely because the judges are responding to a bodily sensation, but they don't know that they are responding to a bodily sensation, so they think they are responding logically. If we are more in touch with our bodies we can avoid those mistakes.

DJ: Got it. I am smiling to myself here as we speak. My wife uses the term hangry.

JGB: Like this is a very clever way of understanding a signal that your body is giving you so that you don't blame other people for it.

DJ: Got it, but one is clearly the stomach and the hunger but are there other common bodily signals that you see leaders missing? Are there one or two things that stand out for you apart from hunger which you spoke about?

JGB: Oh, absolutely, anxiety. Anxiety is huge. When we feel anxious, we make more protective decisions, we make more short-term decisions and many organizations have leaders rushing so quickly from meeting to meeting from crisis to crisis that leaders spend a lot of their time anxious and not noticing that they are anxious. It's just like their regular way of walking through the world, they don't even notice that they are stressed or anxious, which is why mindfulness has come roaring into organizations because actually it gives you a moment to notice what is going on inside you which then helps you decide oh, how do I want to relate to this thing that is going on inside me? If I had a bad meeting an hour ago, and it made me anxious and then I come into this meeting now and I haven't dealt with that anxiety, I am going to be ruled by this short-term fear-based narrow vision that anxiety produces in the brain and in the body with this cortisol that rushes through my bloodstream and I am going to act out of that place probably without even noticing that I was anxious because of the thing that happened just now.

DJ: And maybe just to understand this further Jennifer, even if we take anxiety one would think it is a feeling or a signal to be processed from the mind. How do you think of this as a signal from the body? How does one listen to that signal?

JGB: You can notice what it does to your body. You can notice like what does anxiety show up as or are your palms sweating, is your heart beating? What's your breathing doing? Do you clench your thighs or your belly under these circumstances? Like we can tune into what are the signals I am getting because the mind rationalizes things. Like the core of this book is that we are constantly rationalizing the decisions we are making, the data we are processing, and so we can't just believe that we have got access to it. We need another set of clues and figuring out what is going on in our body is very useful. The best way to process anxiety by the way is to exercise. So we actually want to burn it off. These hormones are in our bloodstream and it is one of the problems with this lockdown right now is how are people able to sweat out the anxiety that they are feeling versus how much are they just having this buildup in them because anxiety is also particularly bad for long-term health and it is bad for our immune systems, it is bad for our mental and physical health. So being more connected to what is going on in your body is extraordinarily helpful in complexity.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The big takeaway for me here is the point Jennifer makes about several leaders being anxious and running from meeting to meeting without realizing that they are anxious. I realize in the coaching work I do, that the biggest unlock is in actually in enhancing the self-awareness of the leaders and opening up some of these blind spots. A very similar point came up in my conversation

with Matthew Walker (MW), a sleep researcher at University of California, Berkeley and the author of Why we Sleep. We spoke about how sleep deprived people are like drunk people. They don't quite know how drunk they are!

*MW: "So in studies where we take individuals and these are studies done by lots of other sleep researchers where we take individuals and we will start to give them different doses of insufficient sleep let's say putting them on a week of seven hours of sleep or six hours of sleep, five hours of sleep, four hours of sleep and over that week or that two-week period gradually we see cognitive impairment, typically we see these what we call cognitive lapses all these micro sleeps. And what's interesting is that we can objectively assess how impaired you are when you are dealing with insufficient sleep. What we can also then ask you as a participant how are you feeling right now and what do you think your performance was like on that last test and we can keep asking that question. So, we have an objective measure of your performance and then we have your subjective assessment. And unfortunately, what we find is that your subjective perception of how well you are doing with insufficient sleep is quite a measurable predictor of objectively how you actually are doing with insufficient sleep. Translated it actually just means that you don't know you are sleep-deprived when you are sleep deprived and the analogy would be a drunk driver at a bar. Maybe they've had five or six drinks and they stand up and they pick up their car keys and they say look I'm fine to drive home. And your response is no, I know that you think subjectively that you are fine to drive home but trust me objectively you are not, you are impaired and unfortunately that's the same way with a lack of sleep."*

DJ: I realize that I am a lunatic when I am sleep deprived. Now, when I go back to my days in IIM Ahmedabad, the nickname I was given was because of my neurotic response to lack of sleep during one of the early days where we had to pull an all-nighter. It took me a few years to really recognize it and work around it. The related point I would make is that as a result, it is also important to focus on how we manage our energy rather than how we manage our time. When are we doing our most productive work? How we plan our day needs to be in sync with when we are at our best and how our body responds is a big part of the equation. I would say now is a great opportunity to architect our days in line with what gives us energy given we have the ability to manage sculpt our schedules given our unique contexts.

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## End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Matthew Walker that is referenced: [Deleterious impact of Devices on sleep](#).

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- 57.01 Jennifer Garvey Berger - Stages of human development
- 57.02 Jennifer Garvey Berger - Transitions in mid-life
- 57.03 Jennifer Garvey Berger - Humans - an outdated OS
- 57.04 Jennifer Garvey Berger - 5 traps that leaders fall into
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- 57.06 Jennifer Garvey Berger - Trap 2 - Feeling right doesn't mean it is right
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- 57.09 Jennifer Garvey Berger - Trap 5 - Shackled by the past
- 57.10 Jennifer Garvey Berger - Actively listening to your body
- 57.11 Jennifer Garvey Berger - Leadership in a post COVID world

## 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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