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Context to the nugget

BJ speaks about how we could overcome the vagaries of our motivation by working on our abilities and by keeping the habit really tiny. He also breaks down ability into a chain and says that our probability of doing something depends on the weakest link in the chain. The chain consists of time, money, physical effort, mental effort and routine.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Let's move to the other piece BJ, ability. You talk about the ability chain and how just to explore the weak links in the chain. Talk to us about what the ability chain is in the context of behavioural change.

BJ Fogg (BJ): Yeah, one of the most important things to do for any type of behaviour, habits especially but there's other types of behaviour like doing behaviour once or doing it for a limited period of time is to make it easy to do and in tiny habits you make it radically easy. And when you look at what comprises ability, what makes something easy or hard to do, it boils down to five different things in the chain model, it is a good model for it because it's the weak link that makes it hard. So, I'll give the five links in the chain. One is how much time does this take? So, if it takes a lot of time and you don't have a lot of time then that's a weak link. How much money does it take? Well, it takes a lot of money and you don't have much money then that can be a weak link. How much thinking does it take? How much physical effort? And the last one is how well does it fit into your routine? So, it could be that all of those links are strong except let's pick the money one. Like it takes very little time, very little thinking, very little effort, it fits beautifully into your routine, but it costs let's say \$199 a month. Well, that's a weak link that makes that behaviour hard for you to do. So, when you are designing habits into your life you want to look at the habit and say what's making this hard to do and can I make that easier. If you are designing for customers, for example, and they are not doing the behaviour even though they are motivated and it's like oh, it's too hard to do what's making it hard? Is it we are asking for too much time, too much money, have we made it too complicated so they have to think and so on and then you shore up the weakest link in order to make it easier to do?

DJ: Got it. And you also talk about people getting caught up in burst or bust cycles and I found that phrase quite interesting and you were just to climb the little habit hills from where we could adapt habits. Talk to us about again the nuance around this approach and why it makes sense.

BJ: So yeah, when we talk about motivation, everyone has a common-sense notion of what motivation is and for the most part that's accurate. The academic work on motivation is actually quite confusing and not as clear as you would think it would be and one of the areas where the

history of academic work and motivation really fails or hasn't happened is when it looks at how motivation shifts over time. I mean, it's pretty ordinary experience to understand at least in the U.S., at least in the culture I am in, you know, in December its Christmas time and people get excited about connecting with family and buying presents. So, motivation goes up to connect with family and to buy gifts. But December 26, boom, motivation goes down. Valentine's Day, people get excited about relationships at least in the U.S. Tax deadline is April 15th, their motivation goes up to do taxes. So, these swings in motivation we have all experienced but it never had been named and it never had been studied even until fairly recently. And so, I named it with some colleagues about five or six years ago and we call it motivation wave. So, your motivation will go up but then it will come down and this is motivation for a particular thing like my motivation to exercise, really high at the first of the year and it goes up and then it starts fading and maybe be your motivation to learn French. You have a trip to France coming up. So, you are motivated to learn French and then after you get home from your trip, it goes down. So, these waves happen all the time and it can be named. I do like motivation wave as a construct. The research on it really is very limited and only there are tiny bits and pieces with only about 2007 where there are a few papers that came out and even now there's not a lot of literature on this. So, it's really odd that there's something that's so common to human experience one, had never been named and two, there's just not a lot of research on it. And there's reasons for that, I mean, the way academic work moves forward especially in the social sciences, it's political, it's driven by lots of things but this is a big gap. So, certainly there hadn't been the insight that motivation and ability are like these teammates and companions and that motivation is going to go up and down and you can't really have tons of control over that. So then you have to focus on ability and that's what the behaviour model really made clear to me was wow, you have this relationship motivation is this slippery thing you can't really control that well, maybe for a limited time but not long term but ability is something you can control and you can design for. So that's why it's called tiny habits and not like exciting habits or motivational habits. Yeah, we can make things really tiny. That's what we can design for very reliably.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I am reminded of something that came up in my conversation with Rich Fernandez (RF) (CEO of Search Inside Yourself, a Leadership Development organization incubated in Google). He speaks about how we think about weaving in mindfulness in the smallest of things we do rather than making it a big herculean task which is one more thing that we need to do in addition to everything else we have going on in our lives. Something that is relevant as we are packing in several things into our lives in these times.

RF: *"The other suggestion I have is something we offer in a curriculum which is make it a set of integrated practices. When people think about meditation, they think about having to do exactly what I have just said which is sati side you know x block of time and you know sit in a certain way and close your eyes and protect the space for formal practice. But there is also a way to practice mindfulness and meditation in an integrated way. For example, as you move through the course of your day, integrate it into your day between meetings if you need to walk to the rest room make that a walking meditation. I am actually serious about that. Become aware of your bodies as it moves for space between your office and the rest room. Become aware of your foot fall, become aware of the felt sense of your body. How are you feeling actually in that moment? Or take the opportunity to focus on breath or this being in India this Podcast you know if you have a "Mantra" that you are familiar with or particularly like us that. And I say "Mantra" and there is an often a religious component to that but here what I am referring to is really finding an object of your attention to train*

your attention upon it whether be “Mantra” or breath or walking or sensation you can really do this throughout the course of your day. I was driving to work today and I was focusing on my breath not so much that I wasn’t able to drive but there but when there is a red light when I was stopped in traffic in and out for three breaths, I noticed my breath. Next stop like same thing integrated practice is also helpful one.”

DJ: Back to what BJ says, keeping the habit tiny and weaving it into some of the other things we do, might help us overcome the vagaries of motivation that we grapple with as we go through our lives.

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End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Rich Fernandez that is referenced: [Developing the meditation habit](#).

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BJ Fogg - Nuggets

- 58.00 BJ Fogg - The Full Conversation
- 58.01 BJ Fogg - The ABC of tiny habits
- 58.02 BJ Fogg - The MAP of behaviour change
- 58.03 BJ Fogg - Prompts - the low hanging fruit of change
- 58.04 BJ Fogg - Action versus Context Prompt
- 58.05 BJ Fogg - Build ability to beat motivation cycles
- 58.06 BJ Fogg - Celebrating to wire in a habit
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- 58.09 BJ Fogg - Getting out of screen addiction
- 58.10 BJ Fogg - The knowing-doing gap

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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