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Context to the nugget

RG speaks about the criticality of seeking and absorbing the feedback from the people around you. He speaks about the role of a spouse who observes us in high resolution and says that they (or close friends or a trusted colleague or a board member) could act as a concave psychological mirror. He speaks about the story of Clementine Churchill (wife of Winston Churchill) whose “feedback letter” to her husband is kept in a museum in London.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I love that metaphor again to your point metaphors do bring it back to life. Let's talk about the Clementine Mirror since you mentioned it, I found that interesting as well. You talk about how leaders can take advantage of their spouses who sometimes can sort of give them the harsh truth. So, if I could dig a little bit more there what's the insight there Gopal?

R Gopalakrishnan (RG): You know we say the CEOs job is very lonely and all that stuff, it acts only as you choose to make it, if you want to be a hermit of arrogance then you can be so. But actually there are lots of resources around you and you need those resources because your brain is damaged as I have said in my book in Crash, power damages your brain and to repair the damage it's like if I hurt my shoulder playing tennis then physiotherapy helps to restore it if not surgery. In the same way if I have got power there is nothing wrong with it, if I exercise power there is nothing wrong with it, but I must understand that it will produce some distortion in my brain and my thinking process and I need physiotherapy for it, this is called brainotherapy. A spouse is one such source; it is not the only source. So, I have used Clementine because she happens to be the wife of Winston Churchill. It could be your wife, it could be a very trusted colleague, it could be a person whom you superseded but who is old friend for 30 years, it could be a board member, it could be anybody else. You have to be receptive to it. The Clementine story itself I don't know if you want me to narrate very briefly.

DJ: It's a good time to maybe briefly talk about it.

RG: Well, you know, I was very struck, when I go to London... when I used to go to London I would often visit museums and so on, I went to the Imperial War Museum in the bunker room near St. James Park, Regent's Park and I found a letter there, framed and put up on the wall and when I peered at it closely, it was handwritten by his wife, Winston Churchill's wife Clementine to him and it read something like “My dear darling Winnie, you are a wonderful man, the nation needs you now, it's dated 1941 or 42. But the other day I heard people saying that you are now becoming irascible and impossible and they are not able to talk to you. My darling Winnie, you know, I love you so much; I would not want anything better for you or for this nation than success in the war. Why don't you mend your ways a bit, your... and it had all... it was a bit torn up and then put together again and the story behind it I learned later was that she wrote this letter, he came so tired that evening that

she said no, no, I can't hurt him further, she tore it up. Next morning she said if I don't tell him who the hell is going to tell him and she put the letter together and that's what is saved and kept there and then of course I have got the actual words which I have mentioned and reproduced in the book. But this is what happens, I don't know how many times my wife has told me what a prick I was in a particular interaction. She says I don't understand what subject you were discussing, I am not interested in because that's not my field but the way you spoke to this guy was wrong and when I reflect on it very often even in a marriage the spouse tells the other person, I keep saying wife but it could be the other way around so I rather use the word spouse, it's not what you told me that I object to but how you told me. Show me a married person who hasn't been through that discussion. So how you do things matters a lot and this is where the Clementine Mirror came in. It is not that Winston Churchill was wrong, it is not that he took the wrong decision, it is not that... but the way he came to his right decision was wrong. Clementine Mirror is what optical mirror does to your face; it shows you how many pimples you have got on your face, especially if it is concave. A Clementine Mirror is nothing but a concave psychological mirror, who provides the mirror doesn't matter.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Earlier in the podcast, I was speaking with Tasha Eurich (TE), an Organizational Psychologist who has been studying the phenomenon of self-awareness for several years now. She calls Self-awareness the meta skill of the 21st century and as part of her research, has profiled a few people whom she calls self-awareness unicorns. People that started from a not-so-great place when it came to their self-awareness but ended up doing a lot of work on themselves over the years to really understand themselves.

TE: *"Our unicorns were able to get feedback and say this is really different then the way I see myself and that's ok that doesn't mean I am wrong and they are right and vice versa it just means that there are different ways of seeing and those different ways are valid and that's what it comes to the prism metaphor so most people think about self-awareness is something you know the simple would be I look in the mirror I see my reflection and that is who I am but it's a lot more complicated and everyone probably remembers from science class when they were young that when you shine a white light through the prism on one end on the other end it comes out as a beautiful rainbow and the way I like to think about self-awareness is you know it's every single reflection or every single light that goes through you get a richer, fuller picture of who you are so every day to point that you get whether it's your own whether it's your spouse, whether it's your co-worker, your employees, your boss each of those are valid and helpful"*

DJ: Building on what RG says, whether you see it as a concave psychological mirror or as a prism, there is a lot of data to be gathered from the loving critics around you. People that care about you and can be candid with you. In the Coaching work I do, I find it really helpful to speak to the spouse and a couple of close friends of the leader who know them from childhood. At senior levels, whether I am helping solve how to grow or where to go, it is really helpful to understand what energizes the person, when is he or she in flow, and what demotivates the person. I tell people that if they need to get to know me, a 30 min chat with my wife is likely to be more insightful than 10 reference conversations on me from my past colleagues. Not tapping into the Clementine mirror is a huge missed opportunity.

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navigated the first few months in a new environment including someone like Gandhiji when he moved back to India from South Africa.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Tasha Eurich that is referenced: [Feedback as a prism vs. a mirror.](#)

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R Gopalakrishnan - Nuggets

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- 59.02 R Gopalakrishnan - Making robust hiring decisions
- 59.03 R Gopalakrishnan - Settling in - Rock climbing versus Running
- 59.04 R Gopalakrishnan - Discerning the pecking order of stakeholders
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- 59.07 R Gopalakrishnan - "Clementine Mirror" - the role of spouses

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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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