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Context to the nugget

Andrew speaks about the criticality of listening attentively to not just what is being said but also what is not being said. He says that the first element involved in judgment is about the quality of the data we consume, the extent to which we do our homework and our ability to ask the right questions to the people around us to get the information that really matters (than be inundated with volumes of information that may not be relevant).

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Let's dive into the six themes you talk about. The first one you say is learning and you say it's about listening attentively and about reading critically, especially in the world we live in where there is a deluge of information given multiple media streams and all kinds of noise in the information that we see, what are some of the things you have seen effective leaders do in the way they manage their time and attention and in ensuring that they are working on quality information?

Andrew Likierman (AL): Well, a theme that's come up again and again and one reads it in the press about leaders is about the way in which they listen to people. I am sure again we have all had experience of people who run organizations, who have long ago given up listening. I mean, they are mainly interested in explaining their own views, not at all interested in other people's and this seems to me a dangerous element because all one that does is just listen to one's own views all the time and the world moves on, the world moves on and yesterday's truths are not necessarily applicable... yesterday's situation is not necessarily applicable today. So that's one element and the other element is I have noticed the fact that people often if you give them a document have not read the document they don't know what's in it and so they are then relying on somebody to come along and explain to them, not even just to explain to them because they don't feel it deserves the time to learn the document they then rely on somebody's else interpretation of the document and that again seems to me hazardous. So, in essence it's about the quality of the inputs of making sure that one has actually understood what the raw material is that one's getting and that very much seems to me part of what would greatly help somebody's judgment.

DJ: Got it. And I think in the article you say if you are overwhelmed by the written briefing material focus on the part that discusses questions rather than those that summarize a presentation and I think I guess that speaks to the same insight.

AL: Yes, and I have been involved in a number of boards where the volume of material is absolutely overwhelming. I mean you require hours and hours to go through this in detail and I mean we are human; it's very difficult to spend enormous amounts of time on that kind of activity. And so, one of

the key elements seems to me is to say, all right, if I am overwhelmed by this what are the key elements I really, really must read and rather than simply saying well, I won't bother or I'll just skim it somehow and therefore not take much in, my suggestion is to go to the key elements, the key questions and say what are these and then make sure for example as a Board Member that you ask the presenter to elucidate those to you if you haven't got them from the papers, so that would be an example.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The point Andrew makes about listening is a profound one. There are different levels of listening that we can aspire to. Among the leaders I work with, I often find that they are so consumed in doing things and filling their calendars that they are left with limited mind space and horsepower to process what is going on. Vinay Sitapati (VS), the author of *Half Lion* (biography of our former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao) speaks about Narasimha Rao's reflection habit and his ability to sift signal from the noise.

VS: *"Narasimha Rao's ability to be introspected to be invert helped him shift the day into what or to put in statistical terms to be able to shift the signal from the noise so I think that is the first thing that introspection taught him that one is it taught him don't trust anyone except your diary which is a pretty good skill in politics second is that you should be able to shift the signal from the noise who are the people you met every day how many people are being honest? How many people are lying? To give you one example one of the diary entries which I have in the book is from 22nd May 1991 this is the day after Rajeev Gandhi has been killed near Chennai and Narasimha Rao until then basically eased out of the congress and was about to become a Monk in monastery called Kutrallam in Tamil Nadu and was closing his bank accounts he suddenly realising that by virtue of being the least ambitious man in the party he's prime to be Prime minister of India and the diary shows 22nd May he's back in Delhi, he's in ten Janpath where Soniya Gandhi and Rajeev used to live and the pieces of Rajeev Gandhi's body there were just pieces, not the full body are kept there and all the congress men around the body pretending to cry some of them were actually crying actually trying to manoeuvre to see who would succeed him? And he has this wonderful passage about how Pranab Mukherji who was in the boon docs them but would later recovered to become president of India beadies up to him and said we think you should become congress president which is the proxy for Prime minister of India and Narsimha Rao immediately says "I immediately told him that I am not the right person knowing full well the kind of person he is, I also gave him the name of ND Tiwari for Prime minister of India knowing even he was that he was even less likely a candidate than I am" and I think the introspection in the diary allows him to do that it allows him to reflect over the day, otherwise somebody else, Pranab Mukherji came up to me and says maybe you should be prime minister of India I wouldn't stop to ask what's his anger? So I think the introspection gave him that ability."*

DJ: At senior levels, I guess it is critical to find your mechanism to look for the signal from the noise around you.

Thank you for reading. If this topic is of interest, you might like the playlist Judgment where we have insights from leaders across domains speak about their take on this topic. This ranges across Zia Mody who speaks about judgment in a legal context, Amit Chandra who speaks about on judgment in investing, Vinay Sitapati who speaks about Narasimha Rao's sense of judgment, Dr Ramachandra Guha who speaks about Gandhiji's sense of judgment when he took big calls and so on. To access this, please go to playtopotential.com/tags/judgment (/t a g s /judgment)

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Vinay Sitapati that is referenced: [The reflection habit - decoding signal from the noise](#).

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Listening: When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. But if you listen, you may learn something new". This is a quote by Dalai Lama. Several leaders talk about their experiences with listening and how they have grown with it. More specifically, leaders also reflect on the criticality of listening when transitioning into a new context. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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Sir Andrew Likierman - Nuggets

- 60.00 Sir Andrew Likierman - The Full Conversation
- 60.01 Sir Andrew Likierman - Defining and measuring Judgment
- 60.02 Sir Andrew Likierman - Listen attentively; learn critically
- 60.03 Sir Andrew Likierman - Seek diversity, not validation
- 60.04 Sir Andrew Likierman - Keeping track of judgment run-rate
- 60.05 Sir Andrew Likierman - Identify, then challenge, biases
- 60.06 Sir Andrew Likierman - Question the solution set offered
- 60.07 Sir Andrew Likierman - Judgment during COVID times

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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