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Context to the nugget

Whitney speaks about how we all need to tune into our “super-power” and discover our strengths and use that as a starting point to discover our next S curve. She speaks about the fact that we are often quite blind to what our strengths are and have the tendency to shrug off compliments when we get them. She suggests some ideas on how we can discover our strengths.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And you also talk about the notion of distinctive strengths, right? If we take the notion of competitive advantage that we talk about thanks to Michael Porter on some of the frameworks around strategy. How do we think about distinctive strengths and competitive advantage as individuals and you talk about different ways of getting to this and more specifically of the various things you say I really liked one of the things you say which is what are the compliments that you get that you shrug off? So, for the purpose of the listeners talk to us about the different ways of getting to discovering one's distinctive strengths.

Whitney Johnson (WJ): Okay? All right. So distinctive strengths. So, what is a distinctive strength? A distinctive strength is something that you do well that people around you don't, like the koala. So, the koala, we look at the koala and are like oh, cuddly little animal but the thing that we don't know is that the koala sleeps about 20 hours a day. Like okay well, if I slept 20 hours a day, how would I survive? Well, the koala survives because it eats eucalyptus leaves which are poisonous to humans and pretty much every other animal on the planet. So, this now becomes its distinctive strength because it doesn't have to forge for food because the food is just one that when the koala wants the food the food's there. So, what does that mean then for us is what we want to do is we want to play where no one else is playing? So, the first accelerant of person disruption that idea of how to grow by playing and then play to our distinctive strengths. Now the thing about strengths that is really interesting, there are a couple of things. First of all, we don't always know what our strengths are and you're probably thinking well, yes, we do. Well, no, we don't know what they are because we tend to be blind to them, they are the blind spots for us because there are things that we do so readily, so reflexively that we don't see them, they're just a part of who we are, and we are completely blind to them. And so, one of the things that I recommend you do is think about asking yourself some questions to help you ferret out what your strengths are and one of them that you just referred to Deepak is... is it Dipak or Deepak by the way?

DJ: D E E P A K actually... D-puck actually if you want the pronunciation, right? It's like the Canadian Puck, the ice hockey puck and Deepak is the English, is the Indian way of pronouncing it, but I am used to Dipak so no worries.

WJ: Well, I am going to try Deepak, see if I can do it, okay Deepak. So, because names are very important, right? We need to be called correctly. So, I apologize that earlier I pronounced it incorrectly. So, one of the things that you mentioned is this idea of what compliments you shrug off. And so, what we want to do with those compliments is frequently if you or I get a compliment we deflect it almost immediately. Like I have found over and over again when I am presenting these ideas in a workshop or a keynote and I ask people about compliments, they can't tell me what they are and it's the reason we do that is we can't tell them is because as soon as we hear it, it's like Teflon. We just completely shrug it off. We almost can't hear it and then if we can hear it because if some people are complimenting us on something that's easy for us, we're like, oh but why don't they tell me something that I do well that I worked really hard to learn? And so one of the things that you want to do in order to know what your strengths are is when someone gives you a compliment do that thing that you don't want to do and write it down because this is your genius and if only when you know what your genius is, only when you know what makes you feel strong do you know what your strengths are and when you know what your strengths are then you are willing to play where no one else is playing and now you have got that second accelerant of personal disruption that allows you to grow, now that you know where you want to grow it allows you to know how to grow is you know what makes you feel strong and then you play where no one else is playing. So those are some starting points for you to figure out what your distinctive strengths are.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: When I work with leaders, often a big chunk of the value adds is in opening the blind-spots in the way they see themselves. One of my earlier guests, Tasha Eurich (TE), a lady who has researched the topic of self-awareness says this quite succinctly.

TE: "Several awareness is made up of two type of self-knowledge. The first is something we named internal self-awareness which is essentially knowing who we are on the inside. What do we value? What are we passionate about? What are our aspirations? What are the pattern of behaviour that we exhibit across situation but equally important is something called external self-awareness and in a nutshell what that means is knowing how other people see us and what was fascinating at least to me in our research was that we found that those two types of self-knowledge which are required for us to really be self-aware but they are not related to each other which I was kind of surprised by I was thought you know if somebody kind of knows you they are from the inside of course they would do the work and find out how they were seen on the outside and vice versa. But we discover that they are you sort have to think about the... independent skill set within the self-awareness area."

DJ: Back to the point from Whitney, I have found that leaders in transition often operate only on the basis of internal self-awareness which is often a distorted picture any way. They don't care to invest in building external self-awareness and that is often a lost opportunity.

One of the earlier guests in the podcast was Rama Bijapurkar (RB) – an accomplished leader and an NED on several high profile Boards. She speaks about how she was optimizing for doing something that required depth in consumer understanding but also something that is strategic for the business. She had tried her hand at Market Research for a while and then at McKinsey, before she chose to carve out her own path.

RB: "So I told you earlier about the quadrant of business understanding and customer understanding wanting the high-high on both because and that was the context in fact in which Indira said it because I was disappointed that McKinsey didn't have the high-high and I was complaining and not doing anything about it so that's when I went and I actually setup my practice to do that and then I

had learnt in McKinsey the framework so there's a framework, so there was a front enders so then I conceptualize that it is a front ender strategy which is what game will you play in the market? So where and how to compete as a business as a whole. And I saw the backend was aligning all your functional strategies with it so the make or buy decision is aligned with how are you best going to fulfil the promise to your customer so it fits with choose the value, deliver that value, signal the value, so I said the front piece is mine and that's a piece I am going to hang on to and in order to make sure when the downstream happens that everybody is true to the game the market game so decided, you need to hire me in order to just be the not the police man but the protector of the strategy that you first had because otherwise it gets blurred as you go down the line."

DJ: I guess the future will be a lot more about how we can create pathways that play to our distinctive strengths. Having a very clear understanding of who we are and what gives us energy will be paramount. Thank you for reading.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Tasha Eurich that is referenced: [Self-awareness: Meta-skill of 21st century](#).

Nugget from Rama Bijapurkar that is referenced: [Shaping your playground](#).

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Whitney Johnson - Nuggets

- 62.00 Whitney Johnson - The Full Conversation
- 62.01 Whitney Johnson - The S curve of personal disruption
- 62.02 Whitney Johnson - Picking the right S curve
- 62.03 Whitney Johnson - Discovering our distinctiveness
- 62.04 Whitney Johnson - Leaning into constraints
- 62.05 Whitney Johnson - Cutting our losses
- 62.06 Whitney Johnson - Rethinking our metrics
- 62.07 Whitney Johnson - Handling our identity
- 62.08 Whitney Johnson - Discovery driven career planning

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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