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Context to the nugget

Whitney speaks about the dilemma that a lot of face at the foot-hills of a new S curve. Should I persist with the pain or should I climb a different mountain? She speaks about the fact that even if we climb the right S curve, statistically, often, it is only a 36% chance of success which leaves us with a 64% chance of failure. She speaks about the 4 questions we need to ask ourselves to discern if we should persist or jump.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And one thing maybe going back Whitney we didn't explore explicitly is stop-loss points, right when we jump S-curves? Do you have anything to say about how people should think about cutting their losses in case they don't get the returns that they expect at the point of jumping from one S-curve to another?

Whitney Johnson (WJ): Yes, that's a great question and you asked me that earlier and I went in a different direction. Okay, so here are the two things to think about around that. So, whenever you jump to a brand-new S-curve, we know from the theory of disruption if you're taking on market risk the odds of success are six times higher but that's 6% to 36%. So, there's still a 64% chance that it's not necessarily the right S-curve. So, here are four questions that you can ask yourself. When you jump to a new S-curve you're not... it feels like and you're at the low end of that S and you are like there's no growth happening and you don't know for sure if it's really not happening or you just can't see it yet. So, four questions you can ask yourself are: number one, am I playing where no one else is playing, so the first accelerant of personal disruption. Number two, am I playing to my strengths? So, you might have a great idea and you might be playing where no one else is playing but if you're trying to do something in an arena where you don't actually fundamentally have any strength, that's going to be tough. The third question you want to ask yourself is it hard but not debilitating. So for example, if you wake up every morning and there's like this mountain of an S-curve that you're trying to scale and you say this is hard but I feel alive then growth is probably on its way but if you're feeling, if you're dreading your work, maybe even getting sick, these can be symptoms of this flat-lining curve. And then the fourth question you want to ask yourself is that, am I gaining momentum? You know if last week it took four hours to do something this week does it takes two hours? Like are you starting to see some momentum even though it might seem small but is that momentum kicking in and if your answers to those four questions are no then it's probably a signal that you need to consider certainly tweaking what you're trying to do, but it also may be a sign that you need to jump to a brand new S-curve knowing that no S-curve is ever wasted. And one favourite quote I have on this is and this is from Seth Godin marketing genius and he says "winners quit all the time; they just quit the right stuff at the right time". And so those four questions can help you know, if the answers are no it's probably time to quit. We know from research that if you don't

quit when you should quit, this idea of a stop-loss our bodies actually generate this inflammatory molecule that contributes to things like heart disease and diabetes and if we don't quit when we're on the wrong S-curve that frustration that we are feeling starts to have this contagion effect in all areas of our life. So, winners quit all the time, they just quit the right stuff at the right time. If you're on that low end of that S-curve those four questions you ask, their answer is no, it's time to jump to a new curve to cut your losses. If the answers are yes, then maybe it's just more persistence is required. What we know from the math is that it's going... if it's a brand-new role it could take at least six months before you start to hit that knee of that S-curve and so sometimes it's just patience and persistence is required. But those four questions will help you know if its patience required or it's time to jump to a new S-curve.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This reminds of my chat with James Clear (JC), the author of Atomic habits who speaks about the notion of Plateau of Latent Potential which at some level is a bit like the foothills of the S curve that Whitney speaks about.

JC: *"Okay, alright so let's say we are heating up this ice cube right and it's I don't know, -5 degrees or something like that and you are heating it up, -4, -3, -2, -1 and the ice cube is still sitting there, you can still see your breath but then you go from -1 to 0 and it's a 1-degree shift just like all those that came before it but suddenly the ice cube melts, you hit this phased transition and the process of improving is very much like that. The process of building better habits and getting results is very much like the process of heating of an ice cube. You hear people say things like this all the time, they'll say like I have been running for a month but I can't see a change in my body, and my argument is running for a month and complaining about not seeing the results you want or writing your book for eight months and not having it be finished yet, it's kind of like complaining about heating an ice cube from -5 to -1 degrees and not melting, like the work was not being wasted, it's just being stored and so you can view each iteration of your habit as building up this potential energy that can then be released later on. I think about there's this quote from the San Antonio Spurs NBA basketball teams, they have won five championships and they have this quote hanging in their locker room and it says something to the effect of when I feel like giving up I think about the stone cutter who takes his hammer and bangs on the stone a 100 times without it showing a crack and then one the 101st blow it splits in two and I know that it wasn't the 101st that did it but all those that came before and that is true for pretty much any habit, right, like it's not the final sentence that writes the book, it's all those that came before, it's not the latest workout that gets your body fit, it's all those that came before. So, the willingness to accept that 1% improvements make a meaningful difference even if they don't show you anything on a given day and then remaining committed to that in the long run, that I think is how you capture the power of compounding habits and of letting 1% percent improvements work for you rather than against you."*

DJ: Just like Whitney speaks about timing, the key is to strike a balance between quitting too early on what could have been a great path versus spending too much time on a path destined to fail. The answer like in most cases in life is somewhere in the middle. Thank you for reading.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from James Clear that is referenced: [Plateau of latent potential](#).

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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
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- 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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