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Context to the nugget

Ramesh speaks about the notion of being versus Doing. He speaks about what it takes to create a safe space, and bringing down the anxiety level to establish a deep authentic connection with the leader you are working with. He speaks about how it has become critical for leaders to be authentic in these times.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And moving to another theme you alluded to early in the conversation Ramesh, the to-be versus the to-do. Talk to us... so; let's spend a little bit of time on this right? Before we go there directly, I guess the broader question I had was if you took a time trend view of the kinds of things that show up at the Bower Forum today compared to let's say maybe eight or nine years back, are there any systematic shifts you see in the kinds of things the CEO grapple with? And then I wanted to shift to this notion of being how do we think about helping CEOs being authentic in the way they come across and show up in the various domains.

Ramesh Srinivasan (RS): I think, as I reflect on the last 10 years' journey of the Bower Forum, I think there are some themes that are timeless Deepak. How do you engage with a board, how do you establish your mandate, how the mandate evolves over time? Those are all timeless themes that we see continuing. I think, some of the themes that are newer, which then reflects my four shifts that I touched on right at the beginning as well, people are thinking about an even broader set of stakeholders that's definitely broadened even more today compared to 10 years ago. I think the notion of humility, listening, culture even more relevant and maybe we will get into that in just a second. I do think the CEO Job even more has become a 24/7 job. So, the need to be present is even higher today. The media exposure is much, much more dramatic and in general, I feel the volatility and change in the world has gone up. So, the importance of being centred, balanced, managing your own energy is even more important and managing fatigue is so much more critical today. Those are some of the newer themes that we see today compared to earlier Deepak.

DJ: And I am just building on that Ramesh, maybe now zooming into this notion of being versus just focusing doing, could you elaborate on that? For the purpose of listeners, what are some of the elements that are a part of this distinction?

RS: I think you know in this current Covid environment the uncertainty is quite high and one of the critical roles of leaders is really helping people manage through this uncertainty even when they may not have all the answers. And that's where the notion of to-be comes in Deepak. And therefore, successful leaders I see are showing much more of their humanity. You know, one of my favourite authors is Brené Brown, who often talks about how vulnerability is power. And CEOs I see using their

vulnerability, being comfortable showing their vulnerability even with large groups of people as a way of influencing both truly listening and connecting with where people are but also then getting input from people as they set direction for the future. I also think it's a time where leaders are showing up from the front. I interviewed Marc Casper, the CEO of Thermo Fisher recently and he was talking about how in this Covid time period he is engaging in large town halls with lots of people, which he was not doing as much as before and he is much more comfortable even if he doesn't know something showing that in these large groups of people. That is quite different today compared to earlier. I see CEOs showing a lot more generosity, authenticity in these large interactions. Those are some of the kinds of things that is on my mind and that is on our mind when we talk about to-be versus a to-do list, Deepak.

DJ: And if I may take a lens of leadership development or coaching being one of the elements of how we can help leaders scale up, any perspectives Ramesh on how the coaching or the approach changes when we are helping a leader navigate at a level of being versus a level of doing? In your mind, do you see any shifts in the approaches to leadership development or coaching in helping leaders ramp up on this dimension?

RS: I think to coach leaders on how to-be versus what to-do, the first prerequisite I feel is creating an environment, a safe space where they can be themselves, bringing down the level of anxiety so that there is a deeper connection to them. Any leader I am trying to coach I try and establish that connection and that emotional connection at a deeper level right at the beginning of that coaching session. One very tactical thing I find is just the power of the exhale, just breathing out is a good way to just start to just let go off things and to be fully present. You know, I have been working with Thomas Hübl, who is an expert on collective trauma and a great coach himself and somebody that I learned how to be present working with him. I find creating that safe space, bringing down the anxiety level, emotionally connecting, using the exhale and breathing to establish that connection is all a prerequisite before you can engage a leader on their underlying fears and helping them show up fully and more effectively in the world, Deepak.

DJ: And maybe just picking up on one of the things you mentioned Ramesh, being present given technology and given the number of things that are screaming for our attention, any thoughts on how to be fully present? I love the tactical point you made about exhaling. Similarly, when we think about being fully present during a moment, any thoughts there?

RS: I think, you know, devices and technology absolutely are incredible in improving our productivity and they have been very valuable to us, but they also come in the way of being fully present, Deepak. The one other tactical thing at least I follow is when I wake up in the morning I... the first 45 minutes, I do not touch my phone and I spend the time, my wife and I, that's our time to connect with each other, to be with each other, we talk about our day coming up, we have a cup of tea together, we will listen to Indian classical music. And I find that time and then you know when she has been going to school, I actually drop her off at the bus stop, that time I find incredibly valuable and it really sets the tone for me for the rest of the day. And once I have had that early practice at the beginning of the day, it's a great reinforcement for me for the whole day. So, my advice to everybody is, you know, the first half-an-hour or 45 minutes, it's the most valuable part of your day, spend that on things that give you meaning and definitely away from devices and being fully present that will help you through the day, Deepak.

DJ: That's a great point Ramesh and also very tactical and easy to implement so thank you.

RS: It is not that easy, by the way, because I find a lot of people I share this with they tell me how hard it is to stay away from their device even for like 20 minutes in the morning. So, you know, it

feels simple but I find that these devices have just become such a part of our life that people find it very, very hard and my advice is if you can stay with it for 6-8 weeks then there's a 90% chance, adult learning shows that there's a 90% chance it will become a habit, Deepak.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Something similar came up in my conversation with Rich Fernandez (RF), CEO of Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute, an organization incubated in Google. When I asked him about how we all could build a habit of being mindful, here is what he said.

RF: *"What I would say is ritualize it and routinize it so make it a ritual or routine so personally for me it's the first thing I do when I wake up, I latterly get up from beds, splash water on my face and I go down stair to my office and then I sit in the morning. This is early morning before the sun is up, I mean early riser and before my family is awake, before I check my email or open up the laptop or look at my phone or anything it's the first thing I do and then second thing I do is I brush my teeth. So, to that level of routinization, it's to that level of ritualization for me. It's just the hygiene factor I call it. So, to the extent you can make the formal practice of meditation hygiene factor it will help make it a habit in your life. 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 set 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 is it moves for space between your office and the rest room. Become aware of your foot fall, become aware of the felt sense if 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: If you like this, you might like the Curated Playlist on Mindfulness. Just go to playtopotential.com/tags/mindfulness.

End of nugget transcription

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

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Ramesh Srinivasan - Nuggets

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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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