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Context to the nugget

Bruce speaks about how families can learn from the Agile Development process and ensure that there is a ritual and a space for having a meaningful conversation around what is important to each member and find a way of addressing the issues given the ever changing context.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And I would love to talk about the transitions project Bruce in a minute. But before that off the various books you have written, I wanted to sort of pick up on one of the things that you talk about in your earlier books in the book *Secrets of Happy Families*, you sort of compare families and what they do and you say that families could learn from the agile development process and I was truly intrigued by you connecting the dots between, you know, what we can do at a family level with agile that one talks about in the Silicon Valley context. Could you talk a little bit about that piece of insight?

Bruce Feiler (RS): Sure. So, I... what happened was I am the father of identical daughters and we were raising our daughters, they were born in 2005 and when you have twins life's coming at you from all different areas, and we sort of got through that initial phase where we were playing what I call defense and we were ready to start playing offense, right? Human beings have something that no other species really only one or two other species of the thousands of animal species on the planet, we have something that no other species has which is that we everybody else when you stop weaning a young member of the species that the young member of the species can reproduce on its own. Humans don't have that; we have this decade if you will between when I think of his potty training and the prom right the first step to the first kiss and that's a decade during which we learn to be social, to interact, to connect with others. That's where we essentially learn the values of what it means to be part of the family and to be kind of a good citizen and a good member of society. And so, I was interested in how you do that and essentially at with this one we were a hundred years after Freud and every parent that I knew was sort of confused because circumstances have evolved, right, the way we were raised by our parents was sort of different and so, yet there was all this wisdom out there whether it is negotiation studies, which was invented at Harvard as you know in the 1970s of how you solve problems or teamwork of how you work on a sports team or how the, you know, I want to talk to Warren Buffett's financial advisor on how to manage money with children and sort of one idea that kept coming up over and over again was this idea of I'll pronounce it the way that we do here in the United States of agile, you know, agile grew up in the 80s, it was a kind of a backlash to an idea that everything was top down, right, that managers would issue orders to executives, executives would issue to managers and managers to team members and this began in software development and it came back that 93% of the projects were late and irrelevant and life had moved on so quickly during the interim where they were trying to solve these problems. So,

agile, which essentially began in Japan and then a group of people in the United States put it together and I interviewed some of the founders of this was like let's be more adaptable, like let's talk every day, let's have a meeting once a week and let's have big information radiators like billboards kind of whiteboards of everybody knows what everybody else is doing. And what happened inevitably is this took over you said Silicon Valley and then it went to GE and TED does it which is one of the reasons I gave a Ted Talk on this topic which anybody can find on the Ted website now. People began to realize that being more adaptable, getting ideas from the bottom up not just the top down and so what happened was it began to migrating into families as in the West as you know we have many more women involved in the workplace, three quarters of women, we have dad's much more involved in parenting. And so, I went to see all these families working with agile development and it just powerfully changed our family and as I have introduced it to the world it has been adopted much more widely and sort of the idea is like your basic checklists in the morning. So, that the parents are not, you know, what are the two most difficult times in every family? The hour after everybody wakes up and the hour before everybody goes to bed. And so, the idea was like give the kids more power like this is your checklist, this is what you are expected to do. We still have, in my family, we have been doing it for more than a decade now, we just had one yesterday, a weekly family meeting where we asked three questions directly taken from agile. What went well in our family this week? What did not go well and which problem will we agree to work on in the week ahead and you have this safe space where children and parents everybody can put ideas on and work on them and you can say we'll try this and we'll try that and a week later if it is not working you can adapt because families are changing all the time. And I think what's powerful about the Agile idea is adaptability and the idea that this week someone's got a presentation, next week, you know, grandma may have a cataract surgery, the week after somebody has a ballet recital, the week after somebody has a big sporting event like lives are changing all the time and so you... it is a structure in which it gives a safe space to manage that change and make sure everybody's communicating with one another.

DJ: Wow. And when do you have that conversation? Is it on the dinner table or do you create a separate?

BF: Oh no, no, it is not on... now you're getting like the person about me that's spent many years thinking of religion and sacred space. So, no, it is not at the dinner table, in fact, nothing can be at the table and when someone brings it, dad's the one that says no. So, we in fact do a little ritual where we have a kind of we play a little game called ma-ma-ma where everybody mimics one another and we sort of enter what amounts to a kind of sacred space where it is like other, it actually happens to be at the table where we will eat dinner an hour-and-a-half later, but this moment transformed into a place where everybody gets to be heard, where conflicts get resolved, remember that thing that everybody was yelling and screaming about on Tuesday, this is where we are going to bring it up and settle it and try not to do it again. So, it is very ritualized. We make some... we do a little tap-tap-tap on the table, we do a ma-ma-ma, it is very ritualistic. If someone doesn't want to ask the words in the way I want the words asked we do it again, and then we leave it. Everybody goes back to their chaotic lifestyle and it is not like we are perfect but it is a mechanism in fact for handling imperfection.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The last year has been a blessing in a way because given COVID, I have had the opportunity to have every meal at home for a period of 10 months. It has given us a great opportunity for us to connect as a family and have a conversation around what is top of mind for us. Clearly, we are not as ritualistic as Bruce suggests but having a space with no devices and no distractions makes for really

interesting conversations, something that I didn't quite appreciate as we were going about our respective busy lives.

End of nugget transcription

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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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