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Context to the nugget

Bruce speaks about how resilience as a term originates from the Industrial age where our lives were shaped by manufacturing and the paradigms around it. He says that it implies that we sprint back to the earlier status quo. He goes on to say that life and transitions are complex and we rarely go back to the old (as we have seen with the COVID-19 pandemic). He urges us to think about shapeshifting instead. He speaks about how we could use lifequakes to rebalance our lives across 3 dimensions which he calls ABC (Agency, Belonging and Cause)

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And you also talk about the fact that resilience may not be the right language in dealing with some of these themes and you use the phrase shape-shifting and say that shape-shifting is a better paradigm than resilience in terms of dealing with some of these lifequakes and transitions. Can you say more here on this notion of shape-shifting?

Bruce Feiler (RS): Well, let me first of all just say that there has not been a more fetishized word in business and in life in the last decade than resilience and the problem with resilience is that resilience is one of those words and ideas that grew up back in the linear age, back when our lives were shaped by the factory and by industrial manufacturing. Resilience actually is a term of physics that began with a spring. And so, the idea was that you would pull the spring and how resilient “the spring” was, was how far the spring would spring back into its original position. So, that implies that you go back after going through a life transition and some people go back but frankly many more people go sideways or forward or to a different direction altogether. So, resilience is not the model and the pandemic is a perfect example of this. If you think when this first happened, we all thought oh, we are going to wait six weeks and we are going to go back to normal. Well, it is we are looking at a year plus at this point and what we’ve now learned is we are not going back, we are going to a different place. And in fact, that’s why when we get in as we go forward in this conversation and start talking about the various kind of stages and phases of a life transition that the first one is to say goodbye to the world that is not coming back, the world without the loved one or without the job or without the title or without the legs or whatever has been lost in the original lifequake. So, instead what happens is that we rethink what’s important to us. And so, the kind of the quick and dirty on the idea of the shape back to the original shape conversation we were having is that there are kind of three pillars we have to how we make meaning in our lives. I call them the ABCs of meaning. And the A is agency, what we do or make or create. The B is belonging, our relationships, our colleagues, our friends, our loved ones, our co-religionists, people we volunteer with. And then the C is a cause, a calling, a purpose or something higher than ourselves. So, we all have a way that we kind of balance these. I am an ABC, I am a writer so, I am very agentic, I am very involved with family and a very active dad and cause is kind of less important to me. My wife Linda Rottenberg who started and

runs an organization called Endeavor that supports high impact entrepreneurs in 50 countries around the world, she's very cause oriented. She gets back to entrepreneurs all over the planet. Then she's very agentic because she's you know a founder and a builder and a social entrepreneur. Relationships yeah, she tolerates the rest of us. So, she's like the CAB. So, what tends to happen when we go through a lifequake is that we rebalance like maybe we have been working very hard and we want to spend more time with our family or maybe we have been a caretaker or caring for an aging relative or a child and maybe we are now moving on from that and we want to give back or maybe we have been giving back in our career, we want to do something more for ourselves. So, what tends to happen in these lifequakes is because they are sort of breaks in the normal, they are opportunities and, in some ways, I would even say obligations to rethink what's most important to us and allows us to kind of breathe, take stock and maybe then shift our priorities somewhat.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: If I look at empirical data and look at the general trend across the people I end up working with a lot of whom are born in the 60s, 70s and the 80s. A lot of them have had busy, successful and often me-centered lives (quite heavy on the Agency side of the equation). They keep motoring along till they hit an event (either an external one or self-triggered) which leads them to question some of these assumptions and gets them to move towards B and C. One could get to a cause a little later in life but I notice that when it comes to belonging and relationships, there are some situations where if you haven't really invested along the way, it is hard to come back in at a later stage.

The reality is that when you grow up in a resource starved country like India where there is heavy competition for every seat, you end up focusing on yourself and the Agency side of the equation growing up and that puts you on a never ending treadmill of being Agentic while ignoring the B and the C.

Of course, I am painting with a super broad brush here. But I guess you get the drift. It is worth reflecting on the paradigm in which we grew up and asking ourselves, which of those elements are still true and consider rebalancing our lives rather than waiting for an external event to shake us.

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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Podcast Transcript [70.07 Bruce Feiler - Shape-shifting instead of resilience](#)

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