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Context to the nugget

Jen speaks about the occasional downsides of some traits like empathy and collaboration. As they say, too much of a good thing might be a bad thing. She speaks about situations where it is helpful for us to maintain a healthy distance from what is going on rather than getting deep into it. She also speaks about situations where collaboration might be counter-productive.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Moving on, one of the other pieces I found interesting was you talking about locating others' emotional expression where it belongs which is with them, what is the nuance here, Jen?

Dr. Jennifer Goldman (JG): This advice comes out of the experience of watching people get stuck on that conflict loop because they got drawn into something that could have just stayed with the other person but once we get drawn into it, now it is our problem too. The advice also comes from so many years of emotional intelligence literature and practice and advice, telling us about empathy and how to be empathetic and I think for sure there are still many many people for whom that advice is super important and people who need to learn how to listen more effectively, how to show empathy for other people. And there, I think, is an ever-growing very significant portion of the population in organizational life of people who are really great at empathizing with other people. Sometimes, over empathizing, just empathizing too much or so much that it gets in our way. And so the advice to allow other people's responses and reactions to remain with them is particularly relevant for those of us who might be likely to be very good at empathizing with other people. And to remember that it is okay and in fact advisable to hold a boundary between ourselves and other people so that if someone else is yelling at me, I have a choice about whether I take that personally and sell myself the story that that is because I am a bad person or I did something wrong or I made a mistake or not, or maybe it is some combination, right. But at the very least, it is not only about me if someone else is yelling at me, right. It also tells me, it is also data tells me something about how they deal with something that they did not like, right. So one of the stories in the book that runs throughout the book is about Bob and Sally, and Bob has this temper where he does not like something and he flies off the handle and Sally, you know, does the same thing right back, there is this blame blame conflict loop. And so my work with them, part of it, was about helping Bob learn how to pause before he would pick up the phone and scream at someone who, you know, was responsible for that day's client mishap. And part of that was also for Sally helping her to not respond every time he would start screaming. And for her to take her own pause and break and just say, look he can scream his head off but he is going to look like the fool if I just stand here and witness it versus the minute Sally I, Sally, start yelling back, well, now I am implicated, right. You can

see this with anyone who has more than one young child, any parent. I can tell you how many times I have said to my daughter, the minute you started yelling back at him or the minute you hit him, now I am not yelling at him, I am yelling at you. Look, now it is your fault too. Like if you have just come to me and said, mommy, my brother hit me, you know, whatever he did to you, you would have been in the clear but now that you are implicated too, now you are both in trouble.

DJ: That is not a conflict loop, that is like a conflict nuclear explosion.

JG: Exactly and very common, more common with adults than we might like to admit but it is the same exact pattern.

DJ: I have an 11 year old and a 7 year old, so that touched a nerve.

JG: Right, exactly. Well, you can help them. Let it stay with the other person.

DJ: Got it. Got it. And maybe just staying with it for a minute, in a way this piece sounds a bit like the point you made around relentlessly collaborate where something that is a virtue which is empathy can actually come in the way if we over empathize, so, you know, there is a downside to too much of a good thing is the way I took it.

JG: Yes, absolutely. Again I think because the world of collaboration has been around for so long, for so many decades now, there is more and more a risk that the things that we have learned how to do in order to do well when we deal with conflict are the things that are now 40 years later getting in people's way. And that is an important thing to be aware of. And to know yourself, you know, if you know that your conflict habit is that you typically blame other people, that is one thing. But you could just as easily be someone who is relentlessly collaborating with other people and that can just as easily get in your way. So know yourself, that is the first practice here, is to know your conflict habit, identify the patterns that you typically get stuck in with other people and then ask yourself, what is really going on here and what could I do that would be different from what I have done before. And there you do not need anyone, I mean the beauty of this methodology too is that you do not need anyone else's collaboration in order to free yourself from a conflict loop. It all comes from within yourself. So, if someone else is going to scream their head off and you kind of disengage from that, well then, like I said before, they are just kind of screaming and you are not involved, it is a much different, there is no loop there, you are free from it.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Like Jen says, with a 7 year old and a 11-year old, there is no shortage of situations or use cases when I get to practice my mindfulness techniques. The other piece worth reflecting on here is the value of diversity I guess at a team level or the family level. I guess it is good to have different conflict styles so that we are agile in the way we respond to a situation. Not to stereotype but I come from a Tam Brahm, middle class, public sector banker father, follow the rules kind of a household in Chennai. My wife comes from an army background, lived most of her life in the rough and tumble of Delhi and thereabouts where free speech and conflict were a way of life.

I have a default preference for conflict avoidance and driving harmony and my wife would often lean into the conflict in some situations. Not to say which approach is better but with the wisdom of hindsight, I do see that for some of the situations, conflict was the only way out of the sticky

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problem. We do have our moments but I do think there is something about diversity in conflict preferences at a collective level and the notion of agility.

Just worth thinking about that in the way it shows up in the team environment as well. Are we getting the most out of the conflict preferences of our team members? And are we putting the right team members to deal with certain situations where their conflict approach might be in line with the kind of response we need in that situation. Thank you for listening for more please visit Playtopotential.com.

End of nugget transcription

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Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Nuggets

- 73.00 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - The Full Conversation
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- 73.02 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Why some conflict patterns are common
- 73.03 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Listening to understand the nuances
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- 73.08 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Real meaning of "take a walk"

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- 73.09 Dr. Jennifer Goldman - Pattern breaking behaviour and Camp David

About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the 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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