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## Context to the nugget conversation

Sally speaks about how women need to think about recognition and mastery to move forward in their career. She goes on to say that women often assume that recognition will “just happen” and when it doesn’t they often double down the rabbit hole of pursuing mastery which can come in the way of them being considered for roles with wider scope.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And moving forward, Sally, in the book, you refer to Anna Fels and her book *Necessary Dreams*. You say that feeling fulfilled at work requires two things according to her, recognition and mastery. And when women do not get enough of the former, which is recognition, they dig deeper into mastery and that can come in the way of assuming a wider span of responsibility. Could you expand on this nuance here again?

Sally Helgesen (JG): Oh, yes, that is such a brilliant insight from Anna Fels in that great book *Necessary Dreams*, which has extraordinary research and that is what she talks about that a real contribution at work is always a combination. You need to be recognized but you need to also feel that you are mastering skills. And the framework I put this in has to do with what I just said about a great career being built on three legs: visibility, connections and expertise. Recognition depends on visibility. So if you do not have the capacity to create visibility for what you are contributing, it is going to be very difficult for people to recognize what you do. So what women will often do as a default is they will overvalue expertise or mastery, say, okay, you know, it is part of that habit number two, which is most popular one in the book, I have to say, expecting others to spontaneously notice and value your contributions. You are reluctant to bring attention to them, so you hope other people notice. They often do not notice because they are busy with something else. Then you start to feel bad because you have put in so much effort and have not been recognized. So you try to solve that problem by working harder and harder and harder, which kind of digs you in further because what you really need to be addressing is a visibility factor, not the expertise factor in other language. What you need to be addressing is the recognition, your ability to get recognized for what you do as opposed to just constantly pursuing mastery.

DJ: Hmm. And in the notion of self-promotion, you also talk a little bit about getting the tone right, the healthy self-promotion, not to go over the top, at the same time, not staying silent. Any wisdom there on getting that balance right?

SH: Yeah, first of all, it is accepting it is not an either/or, it is not either you are the obnoxious person taking up all the air in the room and constantly talking about how great you are, or you just hang back and expect and hope other people notice what your contributions are, there is always a middle

ground. But in finding it, there are many different ways to do that. The example I just gave, thank you, our team did a great job, this is what I contributed. There are many different ways to do that but the most important and I always say this to the clients and the women that I work with, is a successful way of doing that is always needs to come from you. So start practicing, do not try to figure out in advance, okay, you have got to find the exact perfect way of doing this. So on one hand, I do not seem as if I am overly self-promoting but on the other hand, I make sure people know what I did. Instead of trying to find the perfect way in advance, just start doing it. You will make mistakes. Sometimes you will be a little over the top. Sometimes, you will sit back a bit. But you will know you will learn by doing it. It is very hard to just do it all in your head and then turn on a dime and suddenly become very skillful with it. And if you are not sure, ask other people. So, you know, we are going in this meeting, I really am very eager to present to let people know about the success that I had with this, you know, whatever it was, the initiative, whatever I did, I really feel like I need to make people aware. It will be helpful to them in doing their job to know what I have contributed. But I am a little bit, you know, I am not used to doing this, would you just watch me and let me know, do you think that the way that I presented this worked, that it was appropriate, that it landed right, that I found the right tone. So ask other people because you cannot always judge for yourself. So again not going through trying to find the perfect way in advance in your head and then try it out but start trying and start asking.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I like what Sally says here. Rather than sweating too much on getting the tone just right, if we could focus on having the right set of feedback loops to provide candid perspectives on how we are doing, it could be tremendously powerful. As she says, having some people around who can show the mirror can be incredibly valuable. Spouses can also be a great sounding board for something like this. One of my earlier guests Herminia Ibarra (HI) succinctly says “you act your way into a new way of thinking rather than you think your way into a new way of acting”.

Here is Herminia talking about the insight.

HI: *“So let me first bring it to a concrete example of most people can relate too and then we can get to the science because all the research shows that’s we learn by doing. The insight is that we learn by doing. But let’s take for example that classic the person who want delegate the micro manager control freak. So, they know in their head that the right answer is to delegate and empower people. So, you know what the writing answer is? Is this not the matter of finding the right answer and then just executing just implementing your steps toward a better delegate you know what it is but the minute it matters you see it controlling your micro manage. The fact of the matter is the issue is that the real mind set behind that behaviour with your experiences is tied you what’s made you successful is being a control freak. You are convinced you know that your work is better when you do it by yourself. Is so that’s ultimately why you don’t do? Why don’t you execute on the right answer? How do you fix that? You have to take some small steps that actually get you success or more success with delegating and that’s harder so what I found in my research is if you actually get people forget about the delegation actually get them focused on what are some things outside your immediate area that are exciting that you want to work on and as soon as they have something else more interesting that they want to do that they really want to do in their gut they delegate so easily because it’s in their own interest and then they realize they see the positive and then they do more of it and you are on the virtual cycle but they have acted their way into a new way thinking about delegation as supposed just to being a superficial in my head thing that keeps me from doing what we know the right answer is.”*

DJ: Given my limited understanding and experience of how behaviour change works, I think we have a better chance if we take a baby step in some direction and then build momentum with the right feedback loops rather than cognitively overthink it.

Thank you for listening. If this topic is of interest, you might like the Curated Playlist on Women Leadership that has insights from several women leaders on what it takes to unlock the potential of women at the workplace. Please go to [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com). Go to the tab Curated Playlist and then look up Women Leadership.

## End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Herminia Ibarra that is referenced: [Acting your way to new thinking](#).

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### Sally Helgesen - Nuggets

- 74.00 Sally Helgesen - The Full Conversation
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- 74.02 Sally Helgesen - How women often think about ambition

- 74.03 Sally Helgesen - Reluctance in accepting credit
- 74.04 Sally Helgesen - Downsides of pursuing mastery
- 74.05 Sally Helgesen - Leveraging relationships to move forward
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### **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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