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## Context to the nugget conversation

Sally speaks about how it is critical not just to build relationships but to leverage them in a non-transactional way. She goes on to say that a quid pro quo approach to asking for favours from others often doesn't work and suggests a more nuanced approach here.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And back to the three pillars of a good career you spoke about, Sally, one of them being connections. And in the book, you talk about the distinction between building great relationships and leveraging relationships. And you say that women often build great relationships but sometimes do not do enough to leverage them. What is your advice again for women to do this without coming across as transactional?

Sally Helgesen (JG): Yeah, I think that it is very important not to do this in a transactional way. It is really important to leverage people in your career and to be a point of leverage for other people. It creates that give-and-take around which successful careers are built. And it is a key part of organizations really being able to do things too. It is people leveraging one another's skills, resources, connections and ideas. So that needs to be something that you are committed to doing. There are a couple of things that are interesting, one is that because I have started doing some research on what are the most effective ways to engage and leverage other people to help you and to be a resource for them. What is the least effective is a real quid pro quo approach, which was surprising to me. So what is least effective is saying, hey, I am going to help you, I really need help with them getting some connections in this field and if you help me, then I will be glad to get you connections in this field or make a recommendation to you. So when you try to frame it as a quid pro quo as, well, you do this for me, I will do that for you, it takes away some of the joy that the other person can have in actually helping you. And research demonstrates that the number one reason people help other people is because it makes them feel better about themselves. So when you frame it as a quid pro quo, you take away that ability for the other person who is helping you to feel better about themselves. The other thing is, when you want to engage somebody to help you with something, say it is some connections you need, or say it is access to resources, or whatever it is, you want to be as specific as you can about the request. Sometimes, if we are not experienced at doing it or we feel uncomfortable, we kind of fudge it and say, hey, I am kind of wondering, I am wondering if you might be able to give me a little bit of help on, and then you say something kind of vague. It is more specific you are, the more clear you are, the more helpful they can be, oh, you know, I could not really help over that as opposed to just trying to get them to sort of read your mind. So you want to be specific. It is also good to give a timeframe, so the person does not feel like well, if I help her on this, does it mean I am really helping her with that for the rest of my life. No, really wondering if you could help in this timeframe, I get access to whatever it is, that is a very good thing to do, and to

approach it really as a win-win. I think that one thing I have noticed, well, there are a lot of very successful women who are superb leveragers. Men who are successful are virtually always superb at leveraging and engaging other people. And the ones who are most effective, they really do tend to see it as a win-win. They do tend to see, you know, I am asking you to do this for me, I am asking you to be a resource for me in this way and they really do see, now we have a relationship where I can be a resource for you and that that is going to be to your advantage as well. So it is partly I think of it as seeing yourself as a player, as somebody who can be instrumental in helping other people build their careers as well, that is what makes you comfortable.

DJ: Hmm. And when you look at this, I was trying to remember Adam Grant's research around givers, takers and matchers, do you see a difference in distribution for men and women in terms of how they distribute into the three categories or do you see that as largely gender agnostic?

SH: You know I have not really thought of that. I think it is a very interesting question. I think that the goal is that we all want to be more effective matchers, in Grant's language. That is not someone who is always giving in the hope that someday someone will give back to us, which is often where we are unclear about what we need or want or even the fact that that we do want something and then, you know, I do not think anybody really benefits over the long run by being a taker. But we want to be a matcher that is we want to sort of match what our asks and what our offers are to the colleagues and peers that we build and leverage and help ourselves along the way. So I think that is really what we are aiming at. We are all aiming at a better, you know, sort of more skillful approach to being matchers.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Sally's insight reminds me of something I learnt from Herminia Ibarra (HI), one of the earlier guests at the show. She speaks about three kinds of networks – Operational, Personal and Strategic. Herminia says that Operational networks are what get the job done. Personal networks often have a certain emotional quality to them and consist of relatives, friends and so on. She goes on to say that Strategic Networks are the ones that provide breakthroughs and advance careers. Very often, we are not intentional about these networks either because we don't make the time or we aren't deliberate enough.

HI: *"One example that struck my eye a couple years ago so what that to my mind when Beth Comstock was still at GE as chief marketing officer she felt that she was often times much more connected to the outside world than most people in operational jobs at GE which tended to be more internally focused is though she felt even that wasn't the part of the job description that are part which is you can bring that outside in for those people and the example that I love is she was at a book talk in Silicon valley for the launch of "The Lean Start up" by Eric Ries about fast prototyping which originally had a book for start-up how do you go to skill quickly minimum viable prototype but she just has thought we are taking too long in a product department or turbines are taking too long to develop and I bet we could use some of these ideas in our more classic manufacturing context let me make the connection and she did and a big part of GE aviation then got trained on these methods to kind of make the process agile so that for me is a great example of how you can be strategic you have got access to something others don't is so you see the idea here in the need there and you bring them together."*

DJ: Over the last few years, I have started realizing the value of the Power of Weak Ties, going back to the 1973 study by Mark Granovetter. We often think that opportunities come from our strong ties but I have personally noticed they often come from our weak ties. I heard somebody explain quite

elegantly why this phenomenon might be at play. That is possibly because the strong ties are possibly close to our ecosystems and we see similar opportunities as them. So, the net add to the possibilities is limited. But when it comes to weak ties, the Venn diagram of the world of opportunities as they see and what we see has lesser overlap leading to a greater surface area of opportunities if that makes sense.

As Sally says, I guess it is a combination of building the right kinds of relationships and establishing the right tonality of mutual value add in these connections.

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: [Operational, Personal and Strategic networks](#).

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## Sally Helgesen - Nuggets

- 74.00 Sally Helgesen - The Full Conversation
- 74.01 Sally Helgesen - How women often respond to feedback
- 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
- 74.06 Sally Helgesen - Delivering performance vs unlocking potential
- 74.07 Sally Helgesen - Impact of COVID on Women vs Men
- 74.08 Sally Helgesen - Executive presence
- 74.09 Sally Helgesen - Leakage in the leadership pipeline near the very top
- 74.10 Sally Helgesen - Changing the game vs playing by "club rules"
- 74.11 Sally Helgesen - Insights for parents as they bring up boys and girls

### **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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