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Context to the nugget conversation

Sally speaks about the impact of COVID on men and women over the last several months. She goes on to discuss the short term and the long term implications. She speaks about some of the mindset shifts around remote and flexible work that have happened over the last several months and goes onto say that it might actually end up levelling the playing field for women.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And maybe just given its topical, Covid, right, that has changed the intensity to a different level, right, in terms of taking care of the online schooling, taking care of the kids 24 hours, earlier they were away for a while, how has that impacted men and women differently? Do you have a, maybe it is too early for detailed research, but do you have anecdotal insight into how it is impacting men and women differently?

Sally Helgesen (JG): Yes, I do and I think it is really important that we distinguish between the short term impact of Covid, which is for parents, so much, and disproportionately for mothers, so much about the difficulty of homeschooling, the difficulty of having a child at home all the time not able to be in play groups, not able to go to daycare, not able to have people in the house to help care for the child, maybe not being able to have the grandparents in the house caring the child, this is an extremely challenging situation for parents. It has been especially challenging for women and at least in the United States, it is correlated with some declines in female participation in the labor force over the last 14-15 months, which I do also think is related to the fact that women are disproportionately represented in retail and hospitality, which are probably the two most impacted sectors. So that is also, you know, that is Covid related. But it is not to minimize the challenge of that, it has been an enormous challenge and it has been terribly, terribly difficult for many. However, I do think that there is also the side coming out of Covid, the switch to much, the acceptance of so many leaders of how effective virtual and flexible work can be that is going to be overtime an enormous advantage for women. Two examples, one, I was speaking with a Head of HR at a client; it is an energy company here in the US in the South, in the southern US, quite conservative company. And she said this is going to be incredible. She said we have had so much difficulty hiring women because we are very inflexible about anything to do with work from home and we do not give any allowance for people who have children, sick day, etc. She said women who have choices just do not want to work for us. And she said; now our leadership sees that our productivity has not been impacted by this at all. So they are becoming believers in it, she said and I think this is going to make a big impact in terms of our ability to attract women. I was also struck, I read a long interview with the Chair of Tata Corp. Mumbai-based in Financial Times, and this was probably about seven or eight months ago, maybe even earlier. I think it was in last spring, fairly early in the pandemic and he was saying that what this is going to do is to dramatically increase the pace of flexible work hours and

virtual work. He said that he anticipated that Tata would be 70 percent people working from home by the end of this decade, by 2029. And I thought that was really fascinating because although there are challenges in that as long as you have children who are in school and can either have daycare or people, if there are young children in the home helping with them, that is a very good option often for parents, certainly having some flexibility around it. So I think that in the long run, this is going to be a big plus for women and for parents in general.

DJ: Hmm. That is a great insight. Lot of the mindsets around what it takes to be effective at work have fundamentally shifted in the last 12 months and maybe that is an opportunity to level the playing field.

SH: It really is. You know, I was just reading a piece of research today from ADPRI, I think it is called; Marcus Buckingham has associated with it. It was a whole analysis of some engagement surveys that they had done. And the biggest surprise to me in reading this engagement survey is that it showed people who are part of teams have higher engagement than people who are not. But people who are part of virtual teams had actually higher engagement than people who were part of teams where they met on an ongoing basis and that was a big surprise to the researchers and a big surprise to me. So I think there are more surprises like that out there and certainly, in terms of many organizations, there was a challenge for women with children in terms of travel requirements for executive positions. And I can speak for my own experience, that is one of the absolute best things about the experience horrible and painful as it has been through over the last 14 months, is the sort of reevaluation of the role of business travel. And that is another thing I think that is going to be equal, you know, level playing field.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Thank you for listening. For more insights around Covid-19, please go to playtopotential.com and visit the Curated Playlists section. Within that you will find the playlist – Coping with Covid19 which has insights around coping with this pandemic.

End of nugget transcription

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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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