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Context to the nugget conversation

Dan expands on the phrase “Emotional Labour”. This is the effort that a lot of us put in where we feel we are not being our true selves and have to put on a mask. He speaks about the connection between his work in the role of highlights reel and advances in neuroscience.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): In the book, you also use a term Emotional Labor at some point, you refer to Seth Godin who speaks about this as well. And you actually say it takes more energy to hide parts of ourselves than to live authentically. I found that quote quite provoking. And you also say that activating our best selves with a highlight reel increases our resilience against both social stress and sickness, could you talk a little bit about this?

Dan Cable (DC): Hmm. Yeah. Emotional labor is the idea of having to hide what is natural, what feelings are happening naturally. So a really crass example is if you are a flight attendant and one of the passengers grabbed you in a sexual way, they are sort of trained to hide that disgust and that dismay and to obviously be firm but still be positive and pleasant and that is very wearing. Now, that may be a business necessity but is very wearing. And that is a very harsh example. A less harsh example is, if we feel like we have to hide who we are at work, you know, sets a curiosity and just wear the mask as some people call it. That is not actively hiding say disgust but it is in a day out day out basis kind of sanding down our natural selves in order to become somebody that we are not really. And that can wear us out. You know, that causes emotional labor, causes sickness because of the energy consumption. It makes us less good at our jobs. Like another example of that by the way, again, these are harsh examples but it is worth putting them out there. There is a lot of research showing a stereotype threat causes people to do a lot worse because it, like say you go to Stanford University and you are going to be electronics engineer in a class and your name is whatever, Joanne and you are one woman in a class of 72 men, maybe there is one other woman in there. But it is a classic, there is more people named John than there are women, that kind of thing. There is this thing called stereotype threat where you start to become worried of how you are being judged. And that worry becomes a form of emotional labor where you have to kind of show them what you are capable of. But you are so consumed with showing them, you are not able to actually perform as well. So there is really good research on if you can make those people feel better about themselves and their strengths, if you can affirm who they are at their best, they are able to bring more of their thinking to the table because they can be less worried, they can be less anxious. And so the study after study showing this self-affirmation allows us to overcome that stereotype threat. So anyway, there is a whole lot of research on that concept. Your second question though takes us in a slightly different direction and one that I think, maybe I know even more about because I am not really a stereotype threat researcher, although I love that domain, the thing that I have been intrigued by,

and again intrigued does not mean that I know everything about it, but it does mean I have read an awful lot about it, somehow some way when we are highlighting what we are our best, it seems to activate this part of our brain, this ventral striatum. And in the book, I have a book called *Alive at Work*, I call that the seeking system after a neuroscientist named Jaak Panksepp, he called it the seeking system, there is something about highlighting our unique skills, our unique values, what makes us unique as an individual that seems to charge up this part of the brain and delivers a hit of dopamine, which is literally like an energizing neuro, it is a chemical in our brain, it is a neurotransmitter. And that is not only energizing, meaning it is like a free drug that gives us energy, it does seem to reduce anxiety and help us deal with stress. Another way to say that is, it seems to kind of tamp that down a little bit. So that is really powerful and interesting, and I think important. In one of the studies and right now, this is at a revise and resubmit at a journal, we found that by giving people these highlight reels and then stressing them out, they were not only more able to deal with the stress, and I can tell you lot more about the specific study if you think the readers, I mean the listeners would like to hear more, so once you stress them out, they were not only able to perform better, be more creative, solve more problems but they also, we have them expectorate into a cup, which is basically spit into a cup, and then we assayed that for their ability to fight disease, their immunity. And we found that it not only caused them to perform better but it caused them to be more immune to disease. That is really powerful physical results that our body does for us when we highlight and are made aware of what we are capable of. Again, lots of confusion, it is not as though this is final and I am positive that this is the way it works but we have replicated it twice now. And there is really good evidence suggesting that something happens in our brains when we highlight what is unique and best about ourselves.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: It is not an easy journey for each one of us to move towards a state where you are in FLOW and emotional labour seems minimal. One of my earlier guests, Raj Raghunathan (RR) who is a Happiness Researcher at UT Austin speaks about three different strategies when we find ourselves in these kinds of situations.

RR: *“then I have three pieces of advice and this is all based off of other people’s research. So one is that see if you can job craft, I don’t know if your listeners are familiar with this term but it’s basically moving a job in a more meaningful direction. I think that I am a good candidate to speak about it because earlier we talked a little bit about this. Why did I end up teaching a class on happiness? I think at some level I didn’t know you were job crafting at that time but that’s what I was doing, I was teaching regular marketing courses, I am in the Marketing department even to this day, but I felt a little bit uneasy about some of the larger ripple effects that the knowledge that I was imparting was having on the world at large. And so, I ended up concluding that it’s not as meaningful for me to do that. And so, I thought to myself what would be more meaningful is to talk about well-being, happiness etc., so I ended up crafting job crafting. So that’s one thing you can do. And people are often very surprised to learn that where they do attempt to job craft, they actually do not end up facing a lot of obstacles and they end up actually getting people open up new doors of opportunity for them even within their own firm and it doesn’t have to be massive and big. You could be in Sales for example, and you discover that it is really making you travel more than you want to and you have family at home and kids and you are away from them and in the meanwhile you have gathered a lot of insights on what kinds of products people want and so you could actually kind of really help out in the R&D, in the new product group or innovation group. And so most people think that well, I have spent a good 15-20 years in Sales and who is going to accept me in R&D, there is no way that they are going to accept me, but you would be surprised if you just go and talk to your boss or to other*

people in the R&D department, even if it's only for a temporary period if you ask them to spend time for about say six months in that R&D area you might actually encounter a lot more receptivity than you thought. So that's job crafting. The second is of course that you move jobs and let's say that again with this example of Sales versus R&D, let's say that your company actually tells you that no, you don't have experience with that and we already have all positions full, sorry you can't do it. One thing you can do is to hang out with the R&D group, even if they don't allow you to actually take up a formal position there, just hang out with that group and say that you know what every evening I just want to spend one hour with you guys just to see what you are doing and just listen in. I am not going to actually work here but I at least want to know what you are doing. If you take another example, let's say that you are an accountant and your heart is in say scuba diving or something. Just go spend time at a scuba diving shop and volunteer your time and find out what it takes to own a scuba diving shop and go on more scuba diving trips. The idea is that you end up building a set of what might be called tacit knowledge, not formal knowledge, but knowledge that's maybe implicit, difficult to kind of articulate in words but you end up discovering the community that's into that, you end up discovering what aspects of that job that you thought you would really like you actually end up hating. Maybe you don't like the idea of filling up tanks every evening and you thought that that somehow wasn't part of the job of owning a scuba diving shop. So, that's the idea that over time spending two, three, four or five years even sometimes in that area that you thought might be more fulfilling for you will end up revealing to you whether it actually is something that would be fulfilling or it was just one of your aspirational dreams. And what this lady Herminia Ibarra has discovered in her book "Working Identity" is that people who take that path of slowly branching out rather than taking this continuous jump from what you are doing to what you think might be a passion is a much, much more stable way to transition out of the job that you find meaningless to a job that you find more meaningful. What's happening in those three, four, five years is that even though it sounds like a long time you are actually... you are on a journey there, you are on a journey of being from your currently meaningless job towards a job that is going to be more meaningful, but it's not something that a journey that requires you to abandon all your present contacts and your family and put them in jeopardy by doing that. You are taking everybody along for the ride a little bit and you are communicating with them on what's going on and that's a much better path to take, slow and organic path I call it. And the third thing that you can do. Sorry, did you want to say something?

DJ: No, I just wanted to say that I am a big fan of Herminia Ibarra and she was in the podcast a while back as well so completely...

RR: Oh, wonderful, yeah. All right. So and the last one is really let's say that both of these paths are not available to you, I mean the job crafting you can't do it and you really can't afford to spend any more time pursuing what you think might be a second career volunteering for a scuba diving shop for example, then at least, the very least pick up a hobby that's intrinsically motivating for you. Maybe it is solving jigsaw puzzles, maybe it's learning about I don't know Greek history. Nowadays, we have access to so many different resources on the internet that I think it would be a shame if we didn't pursue our hobbies. And it turns out there's lots of work on this that even if you have a job in which you are not into it, it is not meaningful, but you have a set of hobbies that you are into and highly meaningful for you, deeply satisfying that's going to overflow into affecting your job satisfaction. So that's the very least that we can do, I would say."

DJ: These are not easy topics to navigate and I realize that it is a messy journey figuring out these things. Recognizing that leading an authentic life and minimizing emotional labour to the extent possible is a problem to be solved is often half the battle won.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Raj Raghunathan that is referenced: [Navigating mid-life](#).

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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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