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Context to the nugget conversation

Dan speaks about the nuances in delivering feedback that could help people activate their best self. In organizations, feedback is often the key lever for development but very often, no formal attention is given to how people deliver the feedback. He also speaks about the role of gratitude as an emotion in galvanizing a group of people around you.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And bringing it to day-to-day life in the corporate world, Dan, anything we can learn about the art of giving good constructive feedback from the work you have done? Clearly as a manager, you need to communicate strengths. In the context of a role, you need to communicate development areas. In the context of your research around underscoring highlights and positives, what has been your reflection around what it takes to land good feedback?

Dan Cable (DC): Yeah. And I love that last question you just asked is what I wanted to start with. The first bit of advice, which is it is so clear, it has to do with negative and positive feedback. But it is the specific memory, the specific nature of memory. If you tell somebody, for example, you are really good with kids, that is a nice thing to say, or you are very good with details, that is pleasant, that is a really nice thing to say. It is not particularly sticky and it is not particularly energizing, it is not particularly emotional. It does not really help me relive a moment and experience. It does not help my brain light up with what it is that I do best. And the visceral emotional nature of our brain is that it loves stories, it loves a beginning, a middle and an end, it expects that, it remembers that. That is what it is sort of, like, it is responding to that. So I have this way of saying it which is catch somebody doing something right and then help them relive it. It means that if somebody, a friend, a family member but also a colleague, a boss, someone that you work with, does something really helpful, really useful, jot down a couple of things that like, number one, it is a beginning, here is the context, this is where we found ourselves in the middle, here is what you did, here is what you brought to the party, here is what you did that was unique, and then in end, here is how you helped us, here is how you made me feel, okay. If you jot that down, just a paragraph, it might take your five minutes, maximum it would take you 15 minutes, but jotting it down, and really playing through the details, and trying to help them relive it, that is what is going to have that astounding impact. And then even, in my opinion, the idea of writing it down, not just saying good job, you know, that was really good work with that detail but instead taking the time to record the memory with specificity, it speaks volumes that you are noticing them and that you are giving them this gift of a specific memory when they excelled and they really added value, that is going to light them up. Now, it is exactly the same with the negative feedback. But the fact is that is what most of us live, is all the good stuff, we just kind of let go and we assume it, including with our partners, including with our children, we tend to like let all the good stuff become assumed. And then we focus on the couple of

things that did not go well, letting the 98% swish by. But if you need to give negative feedback, I think you know this, the literature is very clear that you do not say you need a little more help with your specificity. You know, you are not always on the ball, you know these types of vague almost incoherent sentences, they frustrate people but they do not see the help people very much. And what you really want to do is a when we had that client meeting and you spoke up in this way and then you kind of went on too long, the affect that that had was to actually push the client away and sort of turn them off and tune them out. And here is how what made us feel. As a firm, you made us seem like we are relevant but the idea of, again, articulating specific details in a story in a memory is I almost cannot give any better advice, so I think that is probably the. The second thing that I do want to say though, and again, I will stop because I do not want to just go on and on here, the second thing that I can say in terms of like giving really good feedback is to remember the emotion of gratitude. Especially in organizational life, we just do not seem to use gratitude very much. In my podcast recently, I did this study, we covered this study around headwinds and tailwinds. And the headwinds in life are like when you are riding your bike or you are running and that wind is blowing in your face and it is kind of feeling like it is holding you back and it is really obvious and salient to you and so we tend to focus on that, like, what is the problem in my life. The tailwinds in life are the things that are going well and they are just kind of pushing us forward, we just do not notice them because it just makes everything a little easier. And we forget to have gratitude for the tailwinds and we focus a lot on the headwinds. And I think this is why in real life organizations, we spend so much time on people's limitations and mess-ups, which tends to kind of shut them down. And so that is a threat emotion that we are causing there. No, I am not saying that people do not need good feedback and when you mess something up, they have to take responsibility for it. But we kind of forget to be grateful for the good things that they do and that is a very energizing emotion. You know, gratitude is a very positive emotion that lights people up, it causes reciprocity. So yeah, those are the things that I would say. I am positive I could go on and on about those but I think that those are the two things I wanted to say.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The only thing, I would add on top of what Dan says is that in my experience, I have seen great leaders focus on not just feedback on the strengths and development areas but they give you an insight around what energizes you and when you come alive. I guess we all are grappling with where to go and how to grow at different points in our lives. Strengths and development areas often provide cues towards answering the How to grow question. But insights around what energizes you and when you come alive can provide cues to the “where to go” question whether it is inside the organization or otherwise and that can be really really powerful for the feedback giver and receiver.

End of nugget transcription

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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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