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Context to the nugget conversation

Dan speaks about situations where we might get into trouble by overusing our strengths. He speaks about how we should watch out for those situations and ensure that our strengths don't become derailers. He speaks about the combination of awareness and intelligence required to navigate these situations.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And as we sort of come towards the end of the podcast conversation, Dan, you also talk about the risk of probably overusing our strengths if we do not apply it thoughtfully. Second, you talk a little bit about what are the watchouts in the context of the highlight reels and strengths, what are some of the things that we should bear in mind so that we do not tip over to the wrong side?

Dan Cable (DC): That is right. This is another one and I am really glad you are bringing it up because practically speaking, there is a concept called Achilles heel, which is another way to say overused strengths. It is another way of saying that your strengths become a weakness if you overdo them. And I have tried to think about this so much because I would never would want to lead people astray. I would never want them to stop being humble about how much they have to grow and also never want anyone to think that they are perfect. You know, we are all flawed and we are all going to die flawed. It is really more about how do we discover the way to do the best part of ourselves more often. And so, in terms of this Achilles heel and overplaying our strengths, I will give you a specific example that I wrote about in the book. In my own self, one of the things that I can do really well is kind of be an extrovert that forms quick relationships and I guess apparently good at like quick vulnerability where I will say very true humbling things about myself, which allow people to open up around me, frankly, to kind of feel comfortable and psychologically safe. So, as an extrovert, I get a buzz from that. So that works great in a classroom setting, it does not work great when I am out on a date with my partner. And I end up spending 10 minutes talking to the bartender, another 4 minutes talking to somebody that seems interesting on the way back and then maybe a 10 minutes talking to a waiter. And I am intrigued, I am lit up, I think that this is exciting and interesting but I am getting dopamine release, I am self-expressing, it is all very exciting but it is not what that date was for. So the way that I am phrasing it these days is to think about the impact that you are trying to create with your strengths. And that is going to vary a lot depending on the context. And if you are not careful, overusing your strengths actually can get in your own way. But if you are careful and if you are thoughtful and if you are intelligent about playing your strengths, you cannot really do them too much. The way Marcus Buckingham put it is, you would never want to turn down your strengths, you would want to turn up your strengths but use them intelligently. And so that is something where I am, you know, I am always working on that myself. I think maybe we all are, but it is just that space

of both staying humble and also that space of using it to create the impact that you seek, not using it for using it sake. Does that make sense to you by the way? Am I am expressing that clearly?

DJ: It is a lot of sense, Dan. The way I interpret it is for us to be aware, right, not to just sort of blindly turn it up all the time, but your point, be aware of where we are on the outcomes we are trying to drive and ensure that we are thoughtful about the application and the context in which we apply it, so that is the way I interpret it.

DC: That is right. And it is really interesting to think about how, like going back to my own thing and just being honest with myself, even in the situation of like say, going out, you know, going out with my partner versus going out with some friends, it can even be the same literal setting, let us call it a pub in London but if the impact that I want to make with my partner is, let me use my strengths with her, I might play up my natural curiosity and sort of entertain her with a story that I heard that day and maybe a piece of science that I read that I am intrigued by and that is playing to my strengths, whereas if I am with five friends and they are having a good time, then it may be perfectly fine for me to talk to the bartender and light up their world a little bit and then all the way back, talk to a wait staff and just kind of light them up a little bit because that is not only playing to my strengths but it is giving me that dopamine rush. And it is a certain awareness and a certain intelligence of using that. I find that really interesting and practical. So I am actually really glad you brought it up, even to allow me to relive it again.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The point about awareness is a good one. Very often we end up using strength like a hammer looking for a nail to hit. The key is not to use it as a habit but being aware and using it contextually. The distinction between habits and awareness was brought to my attention by Devdutt Pattanaik (DP), the well known mythologist who was on the podcast a few years back.

DP: *“This concepts of habits is a western idea, habit is a bad word in Indian philosophy, another word for habit is conditioned I am conditioned to do it, conditioning there’s a pavlovian response, a god has a habit of salivating whenever the bell rings and the west has made it a virtue action without thought is habit repetitive action without thought is habit and if you look at the many of the cultures in the west they are like domesticated animals at a particular time they will get up and run, so they are on a treadmill all the time and this is seen as virtue, driving in a car with a coffee in your hand, nobody sees in America that this is tragedy, it’s a tragedy, you can’t enjoy your coffee, you can’t enjoy your drive you have glamourized slavery, you have glamourized slavery and nobody sees it because you have all the gurujis in white coats with their chin what is called their fist on the chin photographs, these photographs that you see are telling you therefor it must be right nobody is questioning what is the habit? And habit has been somehow projected as a good thing Indian thought is all about awareness, it’s all about awareness, why are you doing what you are doing, why are you not doing what you are not doing, once you are aware then you realize what is of value to you and what is not value to you, so then breaking habits becomes difficult, there are good habits there are bad habits, habits are good or bad depending on context, so you will find people behaving, that’s why I always find, when experts come to Indian they have tough time because their habits suddenly in the new context they don’t know because oh my god there’s no place to run, oh my god they don’t have this thing because of their habit, you become like an animal and habit really goes to the lower part of your brain not the upper part of your brain and habit is about avoiding life, you do habits like it’s an addiction, it’s an autopilot and its addictive, like I have habit of writing, but its addiction if I don’t write I get withdrawal symptoms, which means I have trained my body to be in*

pain when I don't do it and to get pleasure when I do it and I am not aware of it I am just doing it mechanically, so we are an awareness culture, awareness culture not habit culture."

DJ: Like Dan says, we need to be acutely aware of the context we are in and then decide if it makes sense for us to use our strengths or not, rather than blindly applying our strengths.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Devdutt Pattanaik that is referenced: [Building Habits vs Enhancing Awareness](#).

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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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