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Context to the nugget conversation

Tom speaks about how dabbling in a new area often provides a fresh perspective and a new energy to pursue mastery. He speaks about how some of the Nobel Prize scientists are statistically more likely to have participated in amateur activities performing arts, magic tricks and pursuits like that than the non-Nobel Prize winners.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): That's wonderful parallel. Just as we wrap up Tom, I was curious about breadth versus depth, you know, given paucity of time, what's your take on embarking on new things versus maybe going up the mastery curve on a few things? What have you learnt through this phase?

Tom Vanderbilt (Tom): Yeah, I was sort of going back to in trying to achieve this sense of beginner's mind as the Buddhist called it, sort of, seeing the world like a child. I sort of went back to the idea that children are not learning one thing, they are not trying to achieve mastery and I think that they were learning many things at once and it was a very sort of noisy environment and they might not make equal progress on all these things. So, that was sort of my intention and there's obviously nothing wrong with expertise and mastery and there are certain things that I am trying to move toward that in my own life, but it can be an all-consuming process or an exhausting process and I think even a master in something takes a certain pleasure or can get a benefit from dabbling in something else which might provide a fresh perspective, a new energy to their own mastery. There's a great study that I refer to a lot that was also mentioned in a great book by David Epstein called Range, which is about the benefits of being a generalist in an increasingly specialized world, but he's talking about Nobel Prize scientists. The scientists who had won the Nobel were much more likely statistically to have participated in amateur activities performing arts, magic tricks things like this than non-Nobel Prize winners and I feel this is very interesting, it's not necessarily there's a one-on-one relationship between doing this side thing and improving your scientific career but maybe it just gave those scientists a new way of thinking about their work some unexpected perspective, perhaps just brought them joy that made them work in a different way in their own life. So, I think there could just be this even, even once you have achieved mastery this benefit to being unafraid to step away from that mastery and be a beginner in something as clumsy and embarrassing as it can be because that... again, to get back to the point that is when you are learning when you are a beginner. If you are a master you have basically already learnt it so you are sort of continuing on in your practice. So, that was my... I think, each person probably has their own internal compass of how they would like to do something or what they would want, but I would urge people not to be afraid of the word dilettante as a negative reputation these days but I make the point that it goes back to this group of 18th century English people who were in love with the art and culture of the continent and

traveled to places like Italy and just soaked up the music and the language and the food and the art and the history and they weren't specialists, they weren't professionals, they were simply enthusiasts, but they were enthusiasts with a real passion because dilettante means to delight in. So, they took delight in these things and that was the spirit I was going in my...

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I love the point Tom makes about taking delight in things and being a dilettante in a couple of areas. Given the number of unknowns we will have in the world we are growing into, I do think it is a meta skill that will matter more and more in the years to come. The ability to be curious, to step away from mastery in something to being clumsy and begin learning something new baby step by baby step.

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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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