Context to the nugget conversation

Darleen speaks about how leaders should walk the tight rope between letting people be, giving them autonomy and seeking performance. It is a fine line and it is easy to swing too far without realizing it. She speaks about the ATC (Action, Timetable, Check-in) approach in dealing with colleagues.

Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And going back to the competencies of a good virtual leader, the other piece you spoke about was how you drive accountability. What have you learnt about what it takes to drive accountability in a remote context? And the reason I ask is it is a fine line between giving people the space to perform given their context, at the same time having a tab over what they are up to and whether, you know, you as an organization or they are on track on the deliverables. So, how have you seen effective leaders walk that tightrope?

Darleen DeRosa (Darleen): Yeah, and for leaders who are used to walking around and checking in on people or having really clear metrics or being in the office to make sure that people are working, this has been a significant mindset shift for some leaders. Now, for other leaders, this has been totally normative and they don't feel like they need that hands-on management. So, one thing we are often coaching people and talking to leaders about is you have got, again, it's about being deliberate, you have got to be more clear about expectations because in a virtual environment it's harder to set clear expectations, and perhaps more importantly, priority shift. So, how do you as a leader continually check in with people to make sure that they have clear direction? But one thing that we often talk to leaders about is called the ATC model and it's really simple by the way. So, people intuitively understand this, but what we see time and time again is they don't follow it, and I think why it resonates Deepak is because we say that it's an acronym for air traffic controller. So, just like an air traffic controller managing a lot of flights, you as a leader have to help people manage their priorities, their workloads and you can't really see them so you don't need to know what they are doing or when they are doing it, you just need to look at the output; that's much more important in a virtual setting than when people work. So, the ATC model is simple, it's action, timetable, checkpoints and the checkpoints is it gets to your direct question about if you are very clear with people about when you can check-in to support them or what they would like you to do in terms of the check-ins, then you are not going to be perceived as a micromanager. But if I am randomly emailing you or pinging you on Teams to check-in people might feel like that's pressure. But if I said to you Deepak, all right, so you have got this project, when do you think it would make sense for us to have a touch point and you said to me, two weeks and I said great and then we have a touch point. It's not going to feel like hey I am checking in with you all the time. So, again, it's really simple, it's not like this is some profound model but we see leaders micromanage all the time and they are

emailing people, they are sending texts, and they are really not following that balance between delegating and empowering and micromanaging. And then, lastly, I would say that you have got to adapt your style, one-size-fits-all is not going to be an approach here. If you have got a highly tenured employee who's really capable, you probably don't need to check-in as often and that's why it's important to have a coaching conversation with the individual to say, how can I support you? So that style, flexibility and situational leadership matters more than ever.

DJ: Got it. No, it's interesting, I was, one of the leaders I was interacting with, a pretty senior leader in Uber, he had an interesting signature. It said, I have sent this email because it's convenient for me to send it out over a weekend or late at night but I don't expect you to respond immediately. Take your time and respond, just as a part of the default signature and I thought just such a small thing to do but it can be liberating if you had an email with that, it just sort of takes the pressure away from responding to it if you got that email at let's say 5:00 a.m., because that leader might be a morning person and you might have a different rhythm. So, it just felt like a very interesting micro change but something that can change the way people see you as a leader.

Darleen: Yeah, and I think those micro changes that's a great point are actually much more important in a virtual setting because people don't have the cues to really read nuances. So, things that might be perceived as urgent, you know, or going to be perceived as maybe extra urgent. And so, leaders have to role model the right behavior and I think that Uber example is a great example. Another CEO that we were talking to was telling us that he was going to actually request that employees come in two days a week, starting in September and then he said, and that's what I will, you know, recommend to the management team but I am going to be in five days a week and we said so and so CEO, do you realize that that's going to set unintended consequences. And so, it's the role modeling of behavior and anticipating possible consequences of things like sending a text at 5:00 a.m. or an email. And so, you really have to be more thoughtful and planful about how you engage with people.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: One thing I have noticed in the pandemic is that people have the opportunity to clock the hours given what else is going on in their lives. Not everybody needs to do a 9 to 6. I guess, it is all the more important for each of us to clarity the rhythm with which we are working in these times. Like in the case of this UBER leader, it might make sense to spell out some of these things which otherwise could lead to unintended stress in the system.

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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