Context to the nugget conversation

Amy speaks about how companies have to work hard to create a climate of risk taking. She alludes to failure parties at Eli Lilly and the Museum of Failure at Google X to talk about how companies have to work hard to take the stigma of failure away to encourage risk taking. Some of the insights, I guess, are as applicable to families specifically in the context of parenting.

Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): The other piece I am curious about Amy is while we have spoken about psychological safety in a sort of a one-on-one or a team level. At an organizational level, what have you seen some companies do in terms of creating rituals that drive psychological safety in a gathering or in a meeting? Any headline themes there?

Amy Edmondson (Amy): Surely, we talked about Pixar before and they use this ritual, which they label the Brain Trust, and it is a ritual. It's a ritual of coming together with some periodic schedule to evaluate the work together, to figure out what's working what isn't and the ritual itself you can just imagine that people know it's coming, all rituals are things that we expect, we know, we participate in, doesn't make them always fun or always easy, certainly not but they are expected and they are part of who we are and how we do things. In medicine, there is rituals like the morbidity and mortality meetings, the sort of weekly meetings on a Friday usually where clinicians come together and they together dig into the details of a case that didn't work out well and they try to understand together in a very thoughtful way what happened and what went wrong and you can imagine that's not easy particularly given what's at stake, but it's a ritual. And I think the ritual aspect of it makes it more palatable; that's kind of an extreme case. But rituals in companies I have been intrigued to find that rituals like failure parties when a really smart thoughtful experiment didn't go well anyway, even though it was really smart, it was a worthwhile thing to try and it didn't work. Let's have, let's celebrate the effort and the hypothesis and the discovery that that failure allowed.

DJ: Correct, you talk about Eli Lilly where there are failure parties and you also talk about Google X…

Amy: Yes, exactly, that's a ritual.

DJ: …Google X which actually has a, what I read, has a museum of failures if you will of someone's thoughts.

Amy: Yes.

DJ: So, could you sort of expand on some of these fascinating, some of these rituals on the extreme just to provoke ideas?

Amy: Yes, I mean, I think, Google X has the museum of failures, they also have celebrations of the failures because they are explicit in their desire and their goal to break new boundaries to be really innovative in going after very hard problems and making a big difference in hard problems. And they recognize wisely that if that's your ambition more often than not things will fail. And so, if you don't reward that failure, people will just stop taking risks and if people stop taking risks, you won't accomplish your dreams. So, to help people be willing to take those risks you have got the… the psychology of it is that these rituals like the failure parties, the failure awards are really powerful.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: It is fascinating to see the power of rituals in a company context. I guess, we need to be deliberate about creating some of these rituals if we are solving for psychological safety. I guess, at some level, some of these insights are as applicable to our family lives. On this podcast, a few months back, I spoke to Bruce Feiler (BF), the author of Life is in the Transitions who had also authored the book – The Secrets of Happy Families speaks about a ritual in his family.

BF: *"We still have, in my family, we have been doing it for more than a decade now, we just had one yesterday, a weekly family meeting where we asked three questions directly taken from agile. What went well in our family this week? What did not go well and which problem will we agree to work on in the week ahead and you have this safe space where children and parents everybody can put ideas on and work on them and you can say we'll try this and we'll try that and a week later if it is not working you can adapt because families are changing all the time. And I think what's powerful about the Agile idea is adaptability and the idea that this week someone's got a presentation, next week, you know, grandma may have a cataract surgery, the week after somebody has a ballet recital, the week after somebody has a big sporting event like lives are changing all the time and so you... it is a structure in which it gives a safe space to manage that change and make sure everybody's communicating with one another.*

DJ: *Wow. And when do you have that conversation? Is it on the dinner table or do you create a separate?*

BF: *Oh no, no, it is not on... now you're getting like the person about me that's spent many years thinking of religion and sacred space. So, no, it is not at the dinner table, in fact, nothing can be at the table and when someone brings it, dad's the one that says no. So, we in fact do a little ritual where we have a kind of we play a little game called ma-ma-ma where everybody mimics one another and we sort of enter what amounts to a kind of sacred space where it is like other, it actually happens to be at the table where we will eat dinner an hour-and-a-half later, but this moment transformed into a place where everybody gets to be heard, where conflicts get resolved, remember that thing that everybody was yelling and screaming about on Tuesday, this is where we are going to bring it up and settle it and try not to do it again. So, it is very ritualized. We make some... we do a little tap-tap-tap on the table, we do a ma-ma-ma, it is very ritualistic. If someone doesn't want to ask the words in the way I want the words asked we do it again, and then we leave it. Everybody goes back to their chaotic lifestyle and it is not like we are perfect but it is a mechanism in fact for handling imperfection."*

DJ: Thank you for listening! For more, please visit playtopotential.com.

End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Bruce Feiler that is referenced: Happy Families and Agile Development.

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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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