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Context to the nugget conversation

Lloyd speaks about how we get interested in a certain topic or an area and how it slowly grows to becoming a part of our identity. He speaks about how we can look for some of the cues from the past to see how we can reflect on some of our experiences that move us and see if there is an opportunity to lean in towards any of those as we architect our lives.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): The other term you use which caught my attention, Lloyd, was you mentioned that people often approach midlife with their passion, talent smoldering under wet blankets and you also go on to say that the passion that fires a success in the first half of life can also be the fire that destroys our health and our relationships. Can you say more here?

Lloyd Reeb (LR): Yeah, now, this is an area of science and you might enjoy this because you are a scientist at heart. That is what I have believed for a long time that your passions are buried under blankets of busyness, obligation, responsibility and that if I could lift the corner and blow oxygen in, they would ignite. And so, what I have been doing recently is studying the science of how interest forms, for example, there's a big compilation of social science recently done called "The Science of Interest". It's \$100 book, it's very, it's like reading one PhD thesis after another and so I have been studying that and I think this is an area where I think I was partially wrong Deepak. And let me share with you what I have been learning about how passion forms. So, let's say that one of your listeners is in a place where they have got an opportunity to transition, or they have some extra time because something's changed in their life and they have got 40 hours of work at work and then they have got 10-15 hours of free time that they could do something new and they want to make a difference, right? And so, let's just say that they are looking for what their passion is. And so, here's what I have been learning and I will just read to you some things that I think may be helpful. Many Halftime clients or many people who come to Halftime have not been exposed to a wide variety of human experiences or causes. And as a result, they have not tasted the pain of those issues nor the joy of those who are helping us wage the pain. So, it's true that for some people, they might have been abused by a spouse and they are passionate about domestic violence, they might have grown up as an orphan and they may be passionate about orphanage, maybe they were very sick as a child and they are passionate about that. Maybe they saw their father lose a lot of money as an entrepreneur and they want to help entrepreneurs, something like that, that happens sometimes. But more often than not what happens is that this published compilation, the science of interest suggests that people gain interest through stages, they get clear on their passion through stages from exposure to knowledge about it, to confidence around a particular topic and then they move into a passion as they engage with the topic and experience joy. And then this new interest becomes part of their identity and it becomes a passion that they are self-motivated to engage in. So, let me tell it to you

in a story form for your listeners. Suppose a parent notices a child's interest in taking nature photos. So, they buy the child a cheap camera, the child takes a few photos, some turn out, but many do not and the family celebrates the ones that do turn out beautifully and the parent points the child to some YouTube videos to learn more about photography. Soon they begin to capture better photos. The parents buy them a better camera and the family experiences them coming in with great pictures and they start to celebrate them and the person feels the joy of their family seeing their beautiful pictures. And then, as a result, they gain confidence in it. Next thing they notice the child is out when it's hot or when it's raining taking pictures and they are self-motivated to do it. And eventually they begin to hear the child telling people that he is a photographer and it becomes part of his identity. So, part of what you need to do if you are looking for your passion is look past that what's happened in your past, was there a painful experience, but then, also explore, explore a wide variety of things through photos, through stories, through case studies, Google searches, do an urban plunge, we go downtown and see what's happening. And I remember driving through New Delhi with a driver that was driving too fast because we were trying to get to see a congressman or a parliamentarian, right in New Delhi and hit a dog. And the dog was on the ground yelping behind us and the driver didn't even look back, the driver didn't feel any compassion and it made me sad and I wondered is that, does that happen all the time, do people and children and dogs get just hit by things and if so, what could you do about that? Now, that was an experience for me, right? It obviously moved me because I remember it was three years ago, I still remember today. That might be the start of a passion would be to bring more compassion to animals or to children in some poor parts of New Delhi.

DJ: It's an interesting point you make, Lloyd. Sorry, sorry. I was just wondering we talk about something like a liberal arts education after school which is to expose students to a wide variety of perspectives. I just wonder, sort of, I take a parallel to that when we hit midlife, maybe there's an opportunity to widen the aperture and, sort of, as you say experience different things and not just do it cognitively but also do it experientially. Any perspectives there on gaining experience not just cognition?

LR: Yeah, that's really important and... so, I would think of it in these four ways: explore, learn, assess and share. So, explore a wide variety of things even if it's just reading about them. Get a global newspaper and read it every day and ask yourself what makes me mad, sad or glad and go online and go to like master classes or something and take a class in a wide variety of classes or Coursera. Or go to TED Talks and search on disadvantaged children, learning opportunities, the social gap, or medical issues you care about, mental wellness, for example, and explore. I remember coaching some Brad Rex, who was the CEO of the Epcot Center in Disney World in Orlando for 10 years. So, obviously, 10 years as a CEO of a big chunk of Disney you become a customer experience expert. I mean, they are the best in America at the customer experience. And so, when he came through Halftime, he decided he wanted to find the worst customer experience in America and fix it. And he is working on mental wellness. He found that many working poor people, if they are having a panic attack, they can't take off work to go to a mental wellness doctor to get the medicine they need so that they are functioning properly and take care of their three children. And so, he created eHome Counseling, which is an online affordable mental wellness care center so that any Walmart employee can go to the break room and have a private conversation with a mental counselor, a mental therapist, and get the medicines they need or get the help they need without having to leave work and miss pay and get fired or anything like that, right? And so, he went searching, he went exploring for the worst customer experience in America and then that's what he found. So, the learning part is to define a step-by-step process that helps you learn more about that cause. Now that could be as simple as talking to someone who is the Executive Director of a literacy program, let's say, and then you would learn about literacy and then assess it. In other words, you go down,

you try it for a day, you come back and you ask yourself at a heart level was that fun? Was I good at it? Could I fit it into my lifestyle? Can I make a meaningful contribution? And then the last is you start to talk about it and as you talk about it, it's thinking your confusion out loud and it hurts, it begins to shape your identity. It's talking your way into a new identity.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: While the case of the leader from Disney moving to solving Mental Health is an extreme switch, I find that a lot of times, there are interesting opportunities around where we are operating. Cal Newport, the author of the Book – So good they can't ignore you, calls it the Adjacent Possible. If I take my personal example, McKinsey to EgonZehnder was an Adjacency. It was Client Advisory but with a focus on Leadership rather than Strategy. The move to EgonZehnder to what I do now was an adjacency. It is a move from assessing leaders in the context of a search to helping leaders fulfil their potential. I tell people, I just had to change one letter to move from Poaching to Coaching. While it seems like a minor shift, there is a fundamentally different rhythm to my day, tonality of the conversations I end up having and the nature of the highs and lows.

The reason I find this advice helpful is that it helps us leverage some of the past strengths as we move to the next phase rather than completely starting from Ground Zero.

If this topic is of interest, you might also like the Curated Playlist on Identity at www.playtopotential.com.

End of nugget transcription

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Lloyd Reeb - Nuggets

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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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