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Context to the nugget conversation

Sukhinder speaks about how she has built her self-awareness along the way. She goes on to say that she spends time figuring out “who she is” because what she wants often evolves along the way. She also speaks about the criticality of negotiating and having conversations with people around us to solve for the future that we want to go after.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): The other theme we focus on this podcast Sukhinder is about how people make work choices and life choices. In one of the sections of the book, you speak about you, you use the term negotiations with your husband about having a third child while wanting to be a tech company CEO, asking a broader question how have you thought about some of your choices around work and your family life, especially around maternity, which I find to be a point of leakage in the pipeline of women rising to the top, so how have you thought about that at various points in time?

Sukhinder Singh Cassidy (SC): Well, I think that maybe the way I thought about it that in hindsight, I realize it is different than a lot of women or other leaders that I did not necessarily see but more so women who actually, research shows, are more risk-averse, like there is research to support that, you know, that point. I guess I have never thought of it, things as binary and there, it has been my ability to get through. Does that make sense? So I have never thought it is all work, it is all home. If I make a choice for this, it is a choice against this. By the way, there is sacrifices all around and I would say someone is unhappy with me, so that is absolutely true. It was absolutely true, there is no balance. Somebody is always getting disappointed. My family is like you put so much energy into work, people at work are like you are going to your daughter’s water polo game, like, I need more of you and I am like, well, there is only so much. So it is true that you get fairly used to the fact that you are always disappointing someone and that there is some guilt there. But that aside, I think the key for me has always been, do not presume something is impossible unless you first fully negotiate it, at home or at work. Because when women say it is not possible, and by the way, that does not mean you have to want it, like there are severe trade-offs you make. So I am not the person who say to women, you have to want it, this lifestyle, I know that is not what I am saying. What I am saying, if you want it, do not presume it is not possible until you negotiate to the nth degree what is possible. So get into the best possible state through negotiation, as opposed to saying, I opt out. Because when you opt out without having a conversation, you do not know what is possible. So you may or may not be familiar when I was at Google, I was, I got married late, so it is 34, not late in today’s era but for an Indian woman late, but certainly, by the time I got married, I was senior at Google, but by the time I had, I was pregnant with my first child, which is 35, I was already very senior and I was joining APAC and LATAM. And I thought how can I possibly do this. But I really want to stay in this job, I am just getting started. So I went to Google and I said, I would like you to pay for my nanny and

my daughter to travel with me around the world. This is how I stay in this job and to their credit, they said yes. They looked at the opportunity cost of losing me. By the way, not an ideal choice. My husband was left at home alone for ages but better than giving up my job, better than my daughter being at home without me and being a mother, it was like absent all the time. So he got the shortest end of the stick. We were all gone four weeks at a time, you know, two weeks at a time, I have to be empty because my daughter and I, and the nanny were gone. But at least we were together as the unit when she was a newborn. But I did not know that was possible, that was something I brainstormed at home and took to work and then the converse is also true. We talked about, like, later in my career, I wanted to be a tech CEO and my husband thought like how do we have time for their child and we spent a year talking about how to have a third child because I also said, you know, not having a third child would be one of the biggest regrets of my lifetime, like, I cannot imagine it, so let us just keep talking it through until we get to a compromise where it is possible. And then we architected the support we would need to make it possible.

DJ: Hmm. And actually building on that Sukhinder, I guess a prerequisite for that is some level of self-awareness about what we really want, sometimes as you go through these roles, what has been your approach to get to the bottom of what you really want?

SC: That is a tough one because sometimes what we want evolves as we go. So we think we know what we want and then, we end up in a situation in our, like, much happier than we thought and much unhappier than we thought. So like anyone else, I would say, I probably learned self-awareness of who I am earlier than what I want and what I want has evolved. And I think we know in self-awareness of who we are by asking for feedback and if not, like, you know, a lot of people do not get regular feedback in their jobs, like, literally training the people we know and saying like, you are my best friend, what do you think I am good at, like, where do you see me shine, if you do not know the answer, so I think that I had pounded into as an executive all the things that I am not great at and great at because I have had lots of reviews. So that kind of self-awareness is easily more gettable. But figuring out what is at the root of our desire, but yeah, that has been an evolution for me honestly. And I think it is just about talking it through and there is a saying in the book I really like from this person who runs partnership with Facebook. And we talked about, like, I discovered who I was on the way and so I think I am one of those people. So I do not say, I think I have had always known my level of ambition. I do not think I have always known exactly what would make me happy. But it is like anything, every time I went through an experience, I learned more about myself. So I think I maybe have spent more time on self-awareness with maybe who I am than what I want because what I want has kept evolving as I have learned from every experience. So maybe that is not a pat answer but that is the truth.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Sukhinder makes an interesting point. Step 1 is having some self-awareness around what you really want. The next step is to really negotiate with the people around you to see what is possible. One of my earlier guests was Prof Stew Friedman (SF) of the Work-Life integration project in Wharton. He speaks about the notion of being artfully political when it comes to negotiating with the people around us and builds on the work of Joel DeLuca, the author of the book Political Savvy.

SF: *“Joel DeLuca is a really smart guy and he wrote a wonderful book called Political Savvy - Leadership behind the scenes and I have earned a ton from that book and so some of these ideas into leadership on a chapter that’s about moving your idea forward in the real world so after you done some self-analysis and thinking about articulating your values your leadership vision after you have identified the key people in your life and talked about your mutual expectations and gotten of better*

understanding of all those social forces swirling about and you have got a clearer picture of what you need to do to better align who you are with what you do and who you surround yourself with and how you serve them? Well then you've got to make change that's the innovative part the creativity part ... and there's going to be resistance whenever you try to change something so when you are trying to make change happen to look at teaches so well in his wonderful book you have got to of course serve the interest of the people around you so that means to be artfully political is just that know what the real interest of the people around you are and to do everything you can to adjust your plans so I have my students they develop a game plan and a score card for change that they have decided and experiment that takes place over a month or two in pursuit of a four way win and as soon as they try it they realise well this isn't working because I forgot to think about how my boss was going to react or my colleague or my client or my wife or my kids and they have a stake in it so I am trying to create time and attention for me to say take care of myself, maybe go for a bicycle with my children on weekends, connect with them and be healthier with all the benefits might come from that, let me try that and then you realise you thought you were going for bike ride with your daughter any morning and she is busy and doesn't want to do that.

DJ: She often has a busier calendar than I do.

SF: So to the artfully political simply means to be conscious of the interests of the people as you trying to get them to support you, when you are trying to do something new and that's a big insight for people for many of the participants, it seemed simple and straight forward but it's a really important one. And the good news in that is that you can be smarter about what the interest of others are and that's one of the main insights people took from this program and that's why it's really about leadership, creating change and bringing this along with you as you as you are doing it."

DJ: If this is of interest, you might like my conversation with Stew Friedman of Wharton. You can find this at the Guests section at the Podcast.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Stewart Friedman that is referenced: [Managing stakeholder expectations](#).

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Sukhinder Singh Cassidy - 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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