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Context to the nugget conversation

Sukhinder speaks about how we should think about going Broad initially to explore different pathways and then once we know our sweet spot, we should think about going deep in a certain space. Eventually, she speaks about how we should consider going broad to leverage the distinctive capabilities we have built in a certain area and apply it in different contexts. She also speaks about how women sometimes prioritize specialization over generalization and how that can sometimes come in the way of CEO / GM roles that require breadth.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And just a couple of questions before we wrap up Sukhinder, I am mindful of the time as well, as you think about your journey, you speak about specialization generalization, you suggest go broad and then...

Sukhinder Singh Cassidy (SC): Deep broad deep, yeah, deep broad deep, I think I was like, yes, broad deep broad, yes.

DJ: Yeah, so give us a sense of how that has played out for you and how you see the macro choice of going deep vs. broad.

SC: Well, I would say to people, like, look, if you have ever read Malcolm Gladwell, one rises and becomes an expert on 10,000 hours or something and for me, that was Sales and BusDev. So you find an area, by the way, when I say broad, when you come out of school, you do not know most things about building skills and discovering what you love. And for me, I discovered I was so good at sales and I loved it. I learned financial literacy and financial and now analytics. And I learnt to love it, like, I wanted to master it and once I became confident, I really loved the numbers too. I did not know I love the numbers but I do. So I learnt those two things about myself and I ended up as a career, mostly sales and business development, business development being quite a nice hybrid between needing to be able to assess opportunities financially, but also pursue them like sales. So that is great. Okay, so you master something and you can ride quite high on a functional dimension. But if you say, hey, I want to be a CEO, just think about that for a moment. Or I want to be an entrepreneur, I am like, okay, that is about learning the skills you do not know. So by its very nature, you will have to step off the deep track at some point and take a risk to learn something you do not know. Like literally, it turns out that is not like just literal, research also shows that in today's day and age, the best path to a CEOship is a winding one. Literally, CEO and executives who take time to broaden their skills are more likely to attend than those who just stick to what they know. So, if you want to grow does not mean that at some point, you encounter a set of problems that you have no experience in, that is the very definition of growth. It is hard to grow if you know everything. So I am

a big fan of building mastery certainly, that is how we build our superpowers and how we build our reputations, it is where we build our network, that is all true. It is where we can show increasing accomplishment and efficiency and then at some point, what we have achieved mastery, your growth curve stops. And if you want to really become a broader, more capable leader, a CEO, an entrepreneur, a GM, you will have to ultimately go learn the things you do not know and take the risk to take on a new role, take on a new task, take on a new responsibility and I think the difference often between men and women is, men will reach for that opportunity they are not qualified for and actually that works in their favor, and women often would not reach for the opportunity they are qualified for because they are worried about failing or whether they are ready. And I am like, if you waited for when you are ready, growth never happens. So my belief is, yes, build specialization by all means. But then, your growth happens where you stretch yourself to things you do not know and learn how to master new skills.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Something similar came up in my conversation with Sally Helgesen (SH) who has spent a lot of time with Women Leaders. She uses a pithy phrase to make this point. She says that women often put their job above their careers.

SH: *“One of the most popular, if I could say, or the most endorsed habit in the book that so many women identify with where you pour your energies into the job you have feeling that if you do the best job that you can at the job you have, that will translate into being rewarded so that you will be the person who is chosen for a promotion or whatever. And guess what, it often does not work that way and the reason it does not work that way is because of the two other legs of the successful career: visibility and connections. You value your job, so you are putting all your energy, all your time, all your skill, all your effort, all your learning into doing the best job that you can. So you are underinvesting in building those relationships and gaining the visibility that you need and so you are not promoted. Someone else is promoted who has perhaps done a more balanced job of courting visibility and of building connections and then it feels very, very disappointing to you and you feel like, well, wait a minute, how come I did not get that promotion, I did the best job. It may have been your overvaluing what your job was. And also, there is a loyalty element there. A research demonstrates that women tend to see themselves as more loyal and put a higher premium on being loyal to the people around them. And that part of overinvesting in your job at the expense of your career is showing that you are loyal. And I know I have worked with numerous women who have said things like, you know, my boss has really believed in me, so I am not going to talk about what I would like to do next because then my boss is going to see me as being disloyal.”*

DJ: Having the judgment of when to transition from Broad to Deep to Broad is critical I guess. Mathematicians often call this the Explore – Exploit problem where we need to know how much to explore before we start exploiting by going deep.

The other interesting take on this topic is from David Epstein in the book Range. He speaks about the Roger Federer Model where he tries a few sports and picks tennis and goes deep in it and contrasts with the Tiger Woods approach where he starts playing golf from the age of 3 without as much exploration as Roger Federer.

Thank you for listening. If this topic is of interest, you might like the Curated Playlists around Women Leadership and Navigational Principles.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Sally Helgesen that is referenced: [Delivering performance vs unlocking potential](#).

RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

Women Leadership: The fact that we don't have enough women leaders in the Board room is well understood. Leaders share their perspectives on what needs to happen across various stages (education, maternity, late career) for women to rise to the very top. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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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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