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Context to the nugget conversation

Dorie speaks about how she has prioritized her time and attention as her practice has picked up over time. She urges us to raise the bar on meeting people as one builds a brand and more and more people start reaching out for help.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And back to specialization over time, in the book, you also refer to Frances Frei and Anne Morriss, where they say, 'choosing to be bad is your only shot at achieving greatness and resisting it is a recipe for mediocrity.' It was quite counterintuitive, I had to read it a couple of times to make sense of that statement. But one of the things I took away from that was, you say that we need to be a little more definitive about saying no to middling opportunities that come our way that ends up filling our calendar. So in your context, Dorie, as your practice has evolved, how have you applied stage-gates to saying no to things that come your way?

Dorie Clark (DC): Yeah, this is a useful question because nobody ever really makes it explicit that we need to change our criteria over time, that you need to tighten them over time, but if you fail to do it, it can really be crippling because ultimately, you know, it is a matter. When you are new in your career, it is not like there is this big queue of people wanting to meet with you, like there is not. If one person wants to meet with you, it is like, yes, absolutely. But if you have that attitude 20 years into your career, it is going to be devastating because what you get measured on is your ability to successfully complete the projects that you are conceiving and driving, not just, oh, well, can you take a bunch of meetings, like that is not that helpful. So for me, personally, things that I have done, I mean, I now need to have more of an agenda with people. I mean, if I think someone is just a genuinely interesting person, sometimes I will be glad to meet with them, you know, not during my book launch, but in general, I love cultivating genuinely interesting people, but if there is some kind of a professional context, means so often, you know, this is sort of a trick that people pull and I think sometimes, they do it because they maybe do not know any better and sometimes, it is because they actually do want to obfuscate their real intentions, but they will just say, 'oh, hey Deepak, it will be really great to connect, when do you have 30 minutes on your calendar?' It is like, excuse me, did I miss something, did you tell me what you want to take 30 minutes of my time for and so I have just become very vigilant about just at a very basic level asking them, like, no, if you want 30 minutes, tell me what you want to talk about, so I can evaluate whether that is actually worth it or not, or if you just want to try to sell me insurance. So I am curious for you how do you handle this, you are a busy guy, how do you draw the lines in terms of your own schedule and gatekeeping.

DJ: It is a good question, Dorie. In my previous firm, we used to have this metaphor of red men, amber men and green men. When I say men, it is men or women, I am using that in a gender

agnostic way. But they would say that, you know, there are a bunch of people, thousands of people that are looking for your attention. You know, here is my brother's CV, here is my neighbor's, sister's, brother's CV kind of stuff, try and meet the person, and you want to find a way of quickly blocking those if they are not value additive. Then you have amber, where people may not be immediately relevant but like you said, interesting people. Either they are good fun to hang out with, somebody you can learn something from or somebody who could be relevant two-three years down the line. And then you have the green, where they are clients, they are influences, you can learn something from them, etc. etc. So they would say, you know, one of the things they would say is, before you meet somebody in person, ensure that you have a really high bar. It is easier to have a five-minute phone call, you cannot have a five-minute meeting.

DC: Yeah, that looks pretty bad actually.

DJ: So one of the things we would say is, try and have some sort of a frequent flyer program, you have a platinum, you have a gold and you have a silver and in your mind, be clear about what you are offering for silver. So if it is somebody who is amber, maybe you have some mass customized templates, so it does not eat your time but you are still giving something of value to that individual. And if it is a red, then you just find a polite way of letting them know, being polite, but at the same time acknowledging that you have heard from them. So it is work in progress, Dorie, but that is at least roughly the perspective I work with.

DC: I like it. I think that makes a world of good sense. So just out of curiosity for those red people, give me an example, Deepak, like, what would you say so that they do not feel totally blown off, how would you extricate yourself?

DJ: It is a good question. I would say, I have a lady who helps me with my calendar and some of the tasks, so I would say, thank you for your, I would sort of try and, number one, I would minimize the awkwardness and let her communicate, say, by the way, we have received your email, thank you for your interest, and some reason, typically, the kind of work I do does not fit with your profile, if I had to be candid, or currently going through a period of crunch, or I am happy to connect you to A, B or C. The one thing I would try and do is, if somebody is looking for a resource rather than a no, you say, I am not sure if I can help but by the way, you might want to check this out, or lastly, offer resources from the podcast. If somebody says, I am in midlife and I want a sounding board, I say, going through a bandwidth crunch but you might find this conversation with XYZ from the podcast helpful. So hopefully, they are getting value from it anyway.

DC: Clever, I like it. Yes, you are referring them to your pre-existing resources, really good.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I couldn't agree more about Dorie's point about people seeking time without adequate context or agenda. If there is one thing that I have learnt, operating on written communication is disproportionately more efficient in terms of time it takes and the context it provides you to take a call in these kinds of situations. Thank you for listening.

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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