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Context to the nugget conversation

Dorie speaks about the life cycle of becoming an expert in an area. She speaks about 4 waves involved here – Learning, Creating, Connecting and Reaping. She also speaks about the criticality of transitioning from this to the next wave once we exploit the full potential of that space.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And in the book, you talk about four waves in becoming an expert in a certain field, Dorie, could you talk about each of these? You talk about learning, creating, connecting and reaping. Could you expand on these and how you have thought about them at different stages?

Dorie Clark (DC): Yeah, absolutely. So one of the frameworks that I share in The Long Game actually comes as a result of some of the work that I have done with my own coaching clients because people would often come to me and they would be feeling frustrated, they would be feeling like they are in some kind of a rut or that they were working really hard but it did not seem to be getting them anywhere. And what I saw time and again is if you peel back the layers and talk to them about what they were doing, they definitely were working hard, that was true, but the problem was often times, they were working hard at the same thing, they were working hard at the thing that they were already good at or the thing they already knew how to do or the thing that they already liked doing, and where they were falling short was transitioning into doing other things, necessary things. And so what I came to realize is that in our careers, we need to be mindful that we cannot just get away with doing the same thing, we have to be aware of what wave we are in and then shift accordingly. And so the four that I identified, number one is the learning wave because of course when we are new at a company, we are new in a field, you have to take it all in, I mean your whole life is reading the books or listening to the podcast or having the meetings so that you understand who is who and how does this place work and you are soaking it up. But you obviously cannot stay there, you have to make your own contribution at a certain point. And so you shift into creating mode and that is where you are sharing your own ideas. And there is a million ways you could do it. It is everything from speaking up in meetings to starting to offer your own advice, you know, hey, I can do a lunch and learn about XYZ or maybe it is mentoring other colleagues or it is volunteering to present at a conference or whatever it is, but somehow, you have to give back, you have to show people that you have ideas worth listening to. There also then needs to be the connecting phase because your ideas, however good they are, are not going to be very successful or they are not going to get a lot of traction if you are the only one that knows about them. You have to build relationships and build connections so that they can get amplified. And then finally, we get to the reaping phase, which sounds good but that is what we were talking about earlier with Marshall Goldsmith, it is good, it is wonderful to be successful and respected and making a lot of money, but it is not good if you stay there and you stagnate and it prevents you, the kind of golden handcuffs preventing you

from making your full contribution, which is why we need to cycle back at a certain point into learning mode.

DJ: Hmm. I think one of the other guests was a lady called Whitney Johnson, who talks about these multiple S curves and she talks about the same thing. How do you really, you know, we all go through these phases in an S curve and then you need to know when you are tapering off and then picks the next S curve and so on so forth?

DC: Absolutely, yeah.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Just to provide some additional context on Whitney Johnson (WJ). She is the author of the Book Disrupt yourself. She has taken some of the principles of Disruptive Innovation, a term coined by Clay Christiansen of Harvard and has applied it to our lives. She speaks about an example here about how a leader reinvents himself in an organization.

WJ: *“So, let me tell a story that I think really illustrates this idea of what happens with the S-curve. So, imagine that you are a Vice President, you’re one of 25 at a company of 6,000 people and that is what the top of the S-curve looked like for Dan Shapiro. Dan Shapiro had joined LinkedIn in 2008. He had studied Math and Statistics in college. He had then gone to business school; he went to work at Bain in consulting and in 2008 he arrives at LinkedIn and he starts in Operations. But by 2008 he is basically at the top of that S-curve in Operations and I think that often happens when we start a new role is even though ideally we would start at the low end of the S-curve we end up in the sweet spot because people don’t quite know where to put us and they want us as competent as possible. By 2010, Dan’s at the top of that S-curve because typically you expect three to four years but it takes him two years. So, he jumps to the bottom of a new S-curve inside of LinkedIn and he moves into Sales. So, he’s at the low end of that S-curve, but by 2013 he’s now at the top of that S-curve in Sales. When he started, they had about \$10 million in revenue, now they have \$1 billion. So, yes, it’s a rocker ship. He had about eight reports, now he has a thousand reports. And so, he is at the top of his S-curve and he goes and he has his conversation with his boss’s boss, the CEO and says hey, you know, look what happened, like, let’s do a victory lap, I am at the top of the curve. I would love to be a tech CEO myself someday and his boss says to him. Well, if that’s your dream of being a tech CEO, you’re actually on the wrong curve. He didn’t say that, but basically, you’re in the wrong job. You can’t get there from here tech CEOs. They build product you’re in sales. So now Dan’s looking at this saying I am at the top of the S-curve, what do I do? Well, a lot of people in this situation would have said well, I am going to jump to a new S-curve, it’s not going to be here, I’ve hit the top kind of like what I did when I left Wall Street I jumped to a new S-curve somewhere else, but Dan didn’t. He comes back after about two months, he’s deliberating, very frustrated of course, then he says, okay, let’s build great products and his boss is looking and I am thinking what you’ve got a thousand reports, you’ve got a billion dollar line of business and you want to jump from the top of that S-curve to the bottom of the S-curve where you’ve got no direct reports, you’ve got four engineers you’re working with and no guarantees for the future. And based on the data we know, and LinkedIn has a lot of data, people don’t move from Product to Sales, but Dan made that jump. He jumped, he jumped to the bottom of that S-curve. Now, there were parts that he was terrible at because he was inexperienced. He was on a launch point of the curve which is exactly what you want, you want people to be inexperienced because they ask questions like why do you do it like this but there were parts he was amazing at. He had all this ability, all this experience that allowed him to contribute in a really unusual and meaningful way. Six years later he gets up to the top of that S-curve in Product and then he jumps again to the bottom of a new curve now is responsible for all of Sales globally. So,*

that's what it can look like. There's a risk when you do it, there was a risk for Dan, there was a risk for Dan's family because they were like, he probably went home and he said honey, I shrunk my role today that had to have been a really tough conversation. There was a risk for his boss and his boss' boss but that step back, that willingness to become a silly little thing to move down the y-axis of success to a lower axis became a slingshot not only for Dan but also for LinkedIn, so that's what it can look like for you inside of an organization."

DJ: Like Dorie and Whitney say, at some level, I guess, life is a series of S curves for us to ride, almost like swinging from one trapeze to another as time goes by!

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Whitney Johnson that is referenced: [The S curve of personal disruption](#).

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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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