



Context to the nugget conversation

Ravi speaks about how it is very easy to drift through life and it is critical for us to be deliberate about the various choices we make. He urges to pay attention to what we are paying attention to.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I think the other phrase that you use a lot in our conversations Ravi and also in the book is about being intentional about our lives. Can you say more about what that term means to you?

Ravi Venkatesan EP2 (RV): Yeah, So, I think a lot of people, or people I know friends, family colleagues just sort of drift through life, okay? They are like a piece of wood carried along by a stream. Now, when that stream was sort of a gentle one as it has been for some decades that you can probably get away with, but when that stream is a very, very fast-moving one with lots of currents and waterfalls and this sort of thing then the chances of you ending up in some bad places are quite high. So, I say, look, you can't afford to sleepwalk through life, you can't afford to just drift through life, and I think it is imperative right now given the amount of change to be more aware, more thoughtful, more intentional about a whole set of issues. So, for instance, what do I want to do with my life is certainly one that you should be more thoughtful about rather than just grimly hanging on to something that pays the bills. That won't last. How do I want to measure success? Now, that's a question that everybody on this podcast probably has thought about or they wouldn't be here, but for a lot of other people they are living life implicitly by its success criteria set by somebody else. Now, who do I spend time with and time is precious and as I write quoting somebody else, the sum total of the five people you spend most time with. So, if they are going to be so influential in your thoughts, beliefs, and what happens, then you better choose wisely. Where do you get your information from, who do you trust in a world filled with polarising figures and fake news and false information, I think, it is incredibly important that you think about this rather than just believe every WhatsApp that comes your way and every form of demagogue or streaming on TV or whatever. Yeah, so, I say it is even more important to go under the surface and examine your beliefs what you believe to be true and untrue. These things have happened over time without you recognising, it is like malware that has attached itself to your mind and you need to go back and sort of test whether these beliefs are in fact true or should you change them? What do you pay attention to in your question? So, paying attention to what you pay attention to is important because... so, I just make the case that I think at this moment in time it is very, very consequential to be slightly more intentional about these issues. And in fact, the main purpose of writing this book is to provoke people to think and become more intentional. I don't mind if people say look this is rubbish, I disagree with that, that doesn't apply to me. Sure, that's all fine, but I am thrilled that you are at least thinking about it, okay?

DJ: Very true. It reminds me of a conversation I had with a client, at the outside I walked up to him and said why, why me? He said, till recently I wasn't even aware that where to go was a problem to be solved, you know, and to your point, I think you are right, I think just bringing the problem to people's consciousness itself is a feat.

RV: Yeah, and no matter what choices they make, they will make slightly better choices down the road and things will be discernibly better.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: When we are on some of these long journeys, sometimes we don't quite appreciate the Frog in the Boiling Water syndrome playing out. The context around us shifts really slowly and we don't even see it and fast forward 10 years and we end up finding ourselves in a funny place. I am reminded of an advice I got when I was at McKinsey. One of the Senior Partners would say that you should always choose to continue in the Firm every 2 years. He would say that it's a free market and you should speak to your contacts and see what other opportunities exist and choose to pursue a path in the firm. Given there is so much dynamism in the world outside and in the journey within the firm, there is a great opportunity to refresh the thinking and decision rather than just hurtling forward by default.

The other thing that struck me was the point Ravi makes about Attention and Meta Attention. I had an opportunity to speak with Rich Fernandez (RF) (CEO of Search Inside Yourself, a Leadership Development programme incubated in Google). He speaks about this here.

RF: *"Attention is simply the directing of your mental faculty to an object of focus our attention and this is something we all of us do every day. But something that was found in the research is that about half the time 47 percent of the time our minds also wander away from what we are doing. So that maybe we may be focused on something specific we also get distracted quite easily on average about half the time. Meta attention, if attention is the quality of directing the faculty of attention or focus Meta attention is becoming distracted and then knowing that you are distracted. In some ways you could say it is attention of attention knowing when your attention has wandered knowing when your mind has wandered and then bring it back the full attention. That's the difference between attention and Meta attention. Focused attention is direct attention is that quality like I said focused directed attention but when we talk about focused attention in the book and in our curriculum, we talk about it as a skill that you can develop. There is a set of exercise you can use to cultivate it and that is simply, it's very similar to meditation you can sit and watch your breathing for example then we use the breathing as an object of attention when we are cultivating focused attention because first of all it's available to everybody and you don't have to believe in anything to focus on it. You can focus on your breath. Studies have shown that when you do focus on your breathing you activate the attention networks in your brain the direct attention networks in your brain. Focused attention is an exercise to cultivate sustained attention over time. Open monitoring as you pointed out is a slightly different exercise there is a quality of attention there but it's not directed it at a single object its actually kind of opened up and directed much more broadly at much more about a noticing the perceptual field. Allowing yourself for example to simply notice what you notice? I am not speaking in riddles. I'm just trying to explain what it means to like notice your own perceptions that is open monitoring? What are you thinking in this very moment? What are you feeling in this very moment? What might physically you be experiencing this very moment? Your attention moves to this entirely different factor though out you know moment by moment, second by second becoming aware of how your attention is shifting and moving is the process of open monitoring."*

DJ: Back to what Ravi says, what we pay attention to, influences what we end up doing, what we end up doing ends up building our habits and these habits and behaviours end up shaping our lives.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Rich Fernandez that is referenced: [Attention and Meta-Attention](#).

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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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