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Context to the nugget conversation

Dan makes the point that a lot of us are not quite taught to cope effectively with negative emotion. He says that we need to be careful with how we handle regret. On one hand, we cannot ignore it. On the other hand, we cannot wallow in it. Getting that balance right can sometimes be hard.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): In the book, you say that regret does not always have a positive effect. If you let it linger too long or if you replay the regret too often, it can have the opposite effect. How do you think about the Goldilocks balance of using regrets to improve our condition?

Dan Pink (PC): Yeah, it is a really important point and it is super important here. So we have to look for sort of a third way in. So some of us are taught, okay, you have got, I think part of it is that most of us have not been taught how to deal well with negative emotions, and so at some level, some of us, you know, people who, you know, I think there is a slight, I do not know, there might be a slight bias for people who have high levels of formal education who say, well, no, emotions, no, that not a real signal, like, you ignore emotions, emotions are not real, ignore them, that is a bad idea. Then, there are other folks who think that emotions are the main source of truth, and so they wallow in their negative emotions. So emotions are not for ignoring, they are not for wallowing, emotions are for thinking, emotions are signals, emotions are data, emotions are information that is coming in and you actually have to confront them. If you do not, and what happens sometimes is people spend so much time ignoring the emotions, then eventually the dam breaks and they cannot ignore them anymore and then they end up wallowing them. And I think a big part of it is that no one ever teaches us how to deal with negative emotions. And so, we do not have a good underlying theory about what feelings are for. You know, in my view, feelings are, especially negative feelings, negative feelings are for thinking, we got to think about our negative feelings as signals, as messages, as data, as knocks on the door, at whatever metaphor you want to, so we should not be terrified by it or brought down by it, but we should not neglect it either. It is an email that we have to answer. But the problem is that most of us have not been taught how to do that effectively, and I think that is a big problem. And I was looking for massive, again, the qualitative stuff from around the world, by its very nature, I cannot draw stark conclusions from, but now I am really curious about whether there are cultures or traditions that do a better job of dealing with helping people, equipping people deal with negative emotions.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: A related point came up in a different context when I spoke to Tasha Eurich (TE) at the podcast in the context of how we introspect. She says that if we are not careful, it is easy for us to go down the rabbit hole of rumination and that can be unproductive. She goes on to speak about the kind of question we ask ourselves and how that has an impact on the quality of self-awareness.

TE: *"I knew that we would find that the more people introspected the better off they be and that was the opposite of what our data showed so we found that people who self-reflected often were more anxious, more stressed, more depressed, less satisfied with their jobs and their relationship there were even less in control of their lives and we are just thinking maybe self-awareness is bad may be delusion is actually what we wanted to be fostering because it doesn't seem like it make sense and as we started to dig into some of the data we started to discover that thankfully it's not that the introspection in into a self is bad it's just that the way most of us introspect is completely wrong and the best way to illustrate this you know it gone without having two hours to delve into it is to think about probably what the common introspective question is for most people which is the question "Why". So we might be trying to understand why we are in a bad mood you know you could say why am I so upset after that conversation with my co-worker or we might be trying to understand a bad outcome you know like why didn't I get that promotion or we might be even trying to understand why be believe what we believe you know why do I want that promotion but as it turns out those questions not only the do lead us away from true insight about ourselves they give us a false sense of confidence about our knowledge so for example Sigmund Freud was wrong he believed in his work that people could access their unconscious right so like really why am I upset if I just excavate if I just think long and hard and ask that why question I can find the answer. But what has research has shown for decades actually is that no matter how hard we try we can't access so many of those things it's what I mentioned earlier about the behaviour and emotion and knowledge blindness. So, what happens is we find an answer that feels true even its wrong so that an example of where I can lead us away from the truth rather than towards it. Another reason why a really dangerous question is introspectively is it has been shown over and over and over to depress us you know you think about like why I didn't get that promotion. If you are not careful you can start asking question where the answers are well because I'm just a fundamentally bad person and who would want to promote me and you can kind of get stuck in I call it the rabbit hole of rumination and so what we wanted to do in our study was understand if why is the wrong question what is the write question you know what are these unicorns doing differently than the rest of us and it took us a little while to find this pattern but we discovered that when unicorns introspected they almost never asked why question they asked what questions and at first sight I thought ohh that just a weird sort of fluke or weird nuance but as we started to look into it started to make a huge amount of sense. So, one example would be you are going back to the question why I didn't get that promotion unicorns if they were in that situation wouldn't ask themselves that question. Here is some question they might have asked instead. What did I learnt that can help me be better positioned in the future? Or what can I do to close the gap between you know where I thought I was and where I need to be? Or what support can I enlist from the people around me to help me you know to achieve this goal the next time I set it? Or they are going back to why am I so upset about that conversation with my co-worker they might instead ask what part of that situation did I own or what can I do differently in the future to avoid that kind of conversation with that person and so what we found was asking "What" instead of "Why" really helps us avoid so many of the pit falls of introspection where we you know what excavating for the truth that we are never gone find and we are focusing on our problem and feeling victimized and disempowered. So I think what I have loved about that is a really tangible tool that I think we can take away it seems subtle but the difference is huge and I am speaking from personal experience. I have started to use that as well."*

DJ: Like Tasha says, it is important for us to be careful about how we deal with regret so that we don't get into a wallowing mode as Dan says and get the most value from them.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Tasha Eurich that is referenced: [Limitations of introspection](#).

RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

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Regret: Regret is a word that we often use but do not quite understand that well. Jeff Bezos speaks about his regret-minimisation framework for making high stakes decisions. Several people speak about "No regrets" as a way of life. Dan Pink recently wrote a book - The Power of Regret - How Looking Backward Moves us Forward. This playlist has nuggets from our conversation with Dan and some of the other speakers who touch upon this topic. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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Dan Pink - Nuggets

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- 89.03 Dan Pink - Four Core Regrets
- 89.04 Dan Pink - Regrets and Choice
- 89.05 Dan Pink - Counterfactual thinking
- 89.06 Dan Pink - Goldilocks balance in handling regret
- 89.07 Dan Pink - Inward Outward Forward
- 89.08 Dan Pink - Regrets and Transitions

- 89.09 Dan Pink - Rifts and Drifts

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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