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Context to the nugget conversation

Dan speaks about two types of Connection regrets – rifts (an event happens and people separate) and drifts (where people move away from each other slowly). He speaks about having a bias for action when it comes to these kinds of regrets as over the long term people regret omissions much more than commissions.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And moving to connection regrets Dan, you speak about open and close door regrets, and you also speak about rifts and drifts. I love the pithy words to, sort of, digest these things. Can you say more about the distinction between these kinds of regrets and how we can get the most out of them? And more specifically, you urge us to lean into awkwardness and err on the side of showing up...

Dan Pink (PC): Yeah. I think to me, that was a big takeaway from these, especially from the connection regrets. So let me start with the second part. So we can talk about open doors and close doors, we are going to talk about rifts and drifts, and we are going to talk about awkwardness. Let me start with the second one first. So connection regrets are about these relationships that have come apart, and one of the things, it surprised me, that when you read people's regrets and then, you know, I interviewed couple hundred and ninety of these people, what you find is that, the way these relationships come apart is not especially dramatic, it is much more likely to be a drift than a rift, it is much more likely to come apart slowly, imperceptibly, spreading apart like this rather than, you know, some kind of cataclysm, and I think that is very telling. And so what happens then, to the third part of your question, as these relationships come apart, they drift apart, what happens is that one side wants to reach out and they say, it is going to be really awkward to reach out and the other side is not going to care. And here is where we are wrong on so many different levels. I heard anecdotally, you see it in the research, we woefully over-predict our feelings of awkwardness. When we reach out, it is not nearly as awkward as we think, number one, but number two and perhaps even more important, the other side almost always cares. And so, we are wrong and you think, it is going to be awkward and they are not going to care, but you know what, it is not very awkward and they always care. So this is interesting, it is sort of like the bias for action. So, to me, it is like, when in doubt reach out. you know, if you are at a juncture where you are thinking about reaching out, should I reach out, you may answer the question by being at the juncture. Now the trouble here is that, let us go to the first part of your question, open doors and close doors. There is a story in the book of a woman who had a friend, a childhood friend she grew up with, actually New Jersey were used to live. And she had this childhood friend who she grew up with. They were very good friends as kids and they stayed in touch as young women, not super close but stayed in touch. She found out that her friend had a very serious form of cancer and this woman wanted to reach out, I am going to

reach out, oh, but it is going to be awkward, she is going to think it is weird that I am calling her, and finally when she decides to call, she finds out her friend had died that morning. And so, that is a close door, you cannot do anything about that. And the only thing you do with a close door regret is learn from it. And this woman Amy, she actually did learn from it. But with the open door regrets, you still have a chance to do something. And I think for a lot of our relationships, the door is still open. But, as you say, we have to push past our awkwardness and reach out.

DJ: And on a related note, Dan, you say you refer to disclosure, compassion and distance in the way we deal with regret, are these related points in terms of how we make sense of regret and use that to move forward?

DP: Well, yeah, that is what I was talking about before, sort of, refine my thinking a little bit about inward, outward and forward. But yeah, so inward is self-compassion, sort of, treat ourselves with kindness. Self-disclosure is just revealing it or even just converting it to language. And then self-distancing is zooming out and making sense of it. And I really do think that there is a systematic way to deal with this. The problem is that most of us never learn how to do it. And one of my concerns is among younger people who seem to be getting just debilitated by negative emotions because they feel a negative emotion, they feel a regret, they made a mistake, and they think that there is something wrong with them because they look around and feel like everybody else's life is so perfect that they are somehow broken, and that is debilitating, and that can actually lead them into dangerous rumination.

DJ: And that observation, is that linked or is that amplified by the social media where people end up posting, sort of, positive side of the elements of their life and there are people having distorted perception of how others are doing, are these connected?

DP: I do not know but I think so. And I think that if you look at social media, you would think that individuals never have anything bad happen to them except that they have a political opponent who is a terrible person, like, that is the only negative. So political discussions are entirely negative. But when you look at people's presentation of self, it is almost uniformly positive. I have this idea, one of the many academics have been on this show will hear this and do something, I want to know, okay, so here is my research project for you to figure out, here is what I want you to know, let us take something like Instagram, I want someone to do, you can probably do this with some kind of AI, here is what you do, you take a billion Instagram photographic posts, and what you do is you reconfigure the images, so you take out the people, alright, and all you are doing is an evaluation of the weather in the background. And I am convinced that you will have, then you say, oh, what proportion of the days are sunny, rainy, cloudy, alright. And then, my guess is that if you look at, you can narrow it by geography, alright, you can do every post in Mumbai for three years and then you compare that to the actual weather in Mumbai for the last three years, and it is going to be like, oh, it never rains in Mumbai, it is never cloudy, it is always sunny, every single day. So, my true answer honestly, so I have not done the research, and some of the research on the effects of social media is very very mixed, my own instinctive response is that it does not help, it does not help in people doing the endless social comparison and the endless FOMO that is distracting and then, sort of, does not allow them to focus on, what the evidence tells us really matters in life.

DJ: Got it. Going back to one of the things you mentioned Dan about how regrets, especially in the context of drifts, you know, sometimes, it is like a frog in the boiling water kind of a thing, I think you make that broader point about some of the regrets, the core regrets, you say that they creep up on us over time. In these kinds of situations, I am curious about, as journeymen and journeywomen, as we go through our life, how do we ensure we catch ourselves and not succumb to the frog in a boiling water situation when it comes to some of these regrets.

DP: Yeah, that is a really good question. I do not know; I actually have a systematic way to do that. I mean, I do think that there is something to be said for regular self-assessments. Peter Drucker has a technique that I use, because Peter Drucker figured out everything that you and I thought we figured out 50 years ago, I cannot think of what it is called Deepak but I do it myself, is that, what you do is you write a memo or you say, here is my prediction of how the next six months are going to go, this is what I do, and I cannot think what, it is not my idea, it is Drucker's idea, I am going to think through the next six months and here is my prediction of how things are going to go. And then, I put it in drop box and I never look at it, except that six month from that date, I put a tickler in my calendar to look at that. And then I see, okay, so where were my forecasts right, where were they not. And at some level, that kind of punctuation mark, that kind of assessment might allow us to do that. I feel like there is the way to avoid the frog in the boiling water, is to, sort of, set up a timer and stick your finger in to see how hot the water is getting.

DJ: **Lovely, I love the phrase punctuation mark, just an ability to pause and reflect and take stock and move.**

DP: I have become a bigger believer in various kinds of punctuation marks because otherwise, our lives are just, it is like free verse, and it is hard to, you know. I think what Robert Frost said, so I am going to get all the hate mail from poets, but Robert Frost said that free verse is like playing tennis without a net.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I love the point about punctuation marks that Dan makes here. These sometimes provide us the discrete opportunities in a continuum to take action. In this context, I heard something valuable from Katy Milkman (KM), a Professor at Wharton and the author of the book – How to Change. She speaks about the notion of a Fresh Start and the fact that if we look carefully enough, there are enough and fresher start opportunities around us.

KM: "What we found is that there are moments, this would not surprise you at all that feel more like fresh starts to people. And the one that we are all familiar with already is New Years. This is a moment when around the world people are setting resolutions at a higher rate than usual, trying to pursue goals at a higher rate than usual, and it feels like a fresh start. The psychology of New Year's actually turns out to be familiar and extends to many other moments, but the psychology of New Years is you can say, sort of, well, that was the old me last year, the old me could not achieve this, you know, the old me tried to quit smoking and failed, but that was a whole different person. The new me in the New Year can do it. And you feel this dissociation from your past failures in this renewed optimism as you open a new chapter in life. What we found is that New Years is actually just one moment that has that new chapter fresh start feeling. There are lots of other moments on the calendar and in life when we also feel we are turning a page and can get that same dissociation from past failures and motivation, and also the likelihood that we might actually step back and think big picture about our lives is greater. So some of those moments include, according to our research, the start of a new week or a new month, the celebration of holidays that feel like fresh starts in our culture, the celebration of birthdays. And, of course, there is other research looking not only at these psychological or temporal markers that give us the sense of a clean slate and a fresh start, but if you physically change environments, that has not only psychological appeal and helps you, but it can literally disrupt routines in a way that is helpful as well."

DJ: Finding punctuation marks like Dan says or Fresh Start opportunities like Katy says could be interesting approaches to deal with the awkwardness of drifts and the regret that comes with it.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Katy Milkman that is referenced: [The power of a fresh start](#).

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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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