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Context to the nugget conversation

Alisa speaks about how lonely it is to be a Founder and to manage multiple expectations across a range of stakeholders and when you couple that with the fact that they are often operating in areas where they don't necessarily have deep expertise, it can be an unnerving experience.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And another theme you talk about in the book is this notion of impostor syndrome, Alisa. You go on to say that entrepreneurs are dealing with this all the time, they are the cutting edge of something, they are flexing muscles that they have not built over the years, and they are probably trying to open doors that are much bigger than them at every step. What has been your observation about how this plays out and what you have seen some of the founders do to cope with this effectively?

Alisa Cohn (AC): This plays out all the time. I literally, just this week, had a call with a founder and the imposter syndrome for him came out because his board would tell him, oh, you are doing good but you said double that, you know, projection. And in his mind, he is thinking, I do not know if we can double it and also, why are you telling me that, I must not be a good, maybe all your other founders are like just naturally doubling or tripling it and maybe, I am the only one who is not doing it. And also, it is just really hard, it is just the early days when it is not working but as it gets bigger, you have done it before, it is just really hard, and founders often do not have anyone to talk to, and so they are just sitting with their own doubt. You cannot ask your board, well, do all your other companies just triple it without, you know, even like any trouble at all, like am I the only one. It is really hard to ask those kinds of questions, so you feel all alone. That is just one of many examples. Another example is that, and I talk about this in the book, there is one of the founders I worked with, he was great at raising money but when it came to closing executives, he just could not close executives, and I just kept asking him like what is going on. And we finally had a heart-to-heart discussion about it, and he said, you know, I do not mind taking the money from the VCs, that is fine, but if I think about pulling someone away from a secure job that they are doing great at and then to join my company, what if we do not make it. And he felt like he did not have it in him to do that and now it was his imposter syndrome. So those are all the ways an imposter syndrome comes out and plays out, they are very tangible. It is not just your own internal suffering. They actually cause you to, you know, not hire executives that you need to hire and not hire them fast enough. So, there were these many many ways to handle this. First of all, accepting that you have imposter syndrome, recognizing other people have it as well, and then what I like to prescribe for the founders that I work with is to do a highlight reel. So, a highlight reel is where you sit down and you write down five or six successes that you have had, which is amazing, like because you are amazing, so you have done a bunch of stuff that is really impressive, and especially times you have overcome obstacles and overcome

difficult things. And then, you remind yourself, I am actually really capable, it is actually like I am good at this. So, it also reminds you that you can overcome difficult things when you need to. So, when you have that, you can read that every day as like a ritual. You can read it every morning and remind yourself, and you can even add to it. And also, when you are about to handle something harder, the imposter syndrome comes up for you, you can pull it out right there and then, to have a fighting chance of reminding of yourself of the capabilities you have to counteract the feelings of imposter syndrome.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I love the point that Alisa makes about the Highlight Reel. We actually have a full podcast conversation on this topic with Dan Cable (DC) of London Business School. He talks about the highlight reel in the context of each one of us seeking feedback and staying relevant as we go through life. But the same principles apply to Founders, I guess. They just encounter so many rejections and Nos along the way in a day that it can be a tough job holding your morale up. Here is Dan talking about the Highlights Reel.

DC: *“And so anyway, over the last 10 years, I feel like I have learned a lot about how surprised people are when they get one of these highlights’ reels. And basically what that is, it is memories and stories from family, from friends, from colleagues, from mentors, it is people that have watched you over the years, even over the decades. And then they write a story that is their memory of a time you have done something exceptional, that is name of a book, that is why that book is called Exceptional, there are times when you have had an extraordinary impact and here is my memory of you doing that. I just cannot tell you, number one, how powerful and emotional that is to read it from other people, as opposed to just self-reflecting, so that is one thing. I think a second thing I will put out there is, just the vast number of new insights that you can get, because a lot of things that people remember for 15 years, 20 years, and they write down in a lot of detail you might not even think of as a big deal. You might think oh no, that is just easy, that is what anybody would do. And if you have seven, eight, nine people writing different stories but around that same theme but you yourself just do not think that is a big deal, that highlight reel starts to unveil ways of you becoming exceptional and I call them high leverage moves. It is just a way that you can do a little more in area and create a much bigger impact but you would not do it because you kind of downplay, you think anybody would do it.”*

DJ: Like Alisa, says, not only can Highlights Reels help pick ourselves up when we are going through a rough spot, they can also often shed insights that can often be in our blind spot that can help us become a better version of ourselves.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Dan Cable that is referenced: [Crowd-sourcing your highlights reel](#).

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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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