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Context to the nugget conversation

Alisa speaks about how authentic praise is such an unused tool in Leadership. She speaks about how the team sometimes can start spinning wheels in their head about their performance and their standing if they don't get adequate good quality feedback.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): In the book, you talk about the notion of praise and you actually say, as a CEO, you do not often see the hidden cost of the lack of praise, I like the way you phrased it, can you talk a little bit about the economics of praise, if I may ask you?

Alisa Cohn (AC): The economics of praise, that is very good. So, the economics of praise are this, you have got people in your extreme work environment with you, you have got them, and you do not know if you are making progress, you hope you are but you are not sure all the time, maybe even going backwards sometimes, they do not know if they are making progress. So, the way to make sure they know they are making progress is to give them positive attention and give them praise. So, praise is simple like great job facilitating that meeting, or you are always on time with your deliverables, not everybody is, I really appreciate it, or it might be, you are the most strategic person we have on the team, it could be any of that and that praise helps them see the value of their work, it helps them feel seen, it helps them feel like, you know it gives them a positive dopamine hit, so they can like, you know, continue to work for you. Even, I will tell you a personal experience, I was working within a company and doing this very high stakes off-site sort of team-building thing, team facilitation event, and I was telling about what we were going to do, what was going to happen, that was some COO and the COO turned to me and said, I trust you. And to me, that was the most motivating thing ever. And it made me want to do it an even better job and because I felt super confident going into the thing and that is a version of praise or positive attention that CEOs and founders very often forget. And then, the hidden cost is that people are wondering. To me, the wondering is always the enemy. They are wondering, did he like that meeting, did he like that presentation, was my spreadsheet okay, he did not say anything, I am not really sure. In my book, I talk about this that, I remember vividly this experience, there was an employee named Wilson, an executive, who was a great executive. And I was just talking about something and out of nowhere he said about the CEO, I mean, I think she likes me, I think everything is okay, I think that she would tell me if there was a problem and I said, wait, Wilson, she loves you, she thinks you are a creative genius, what are you talking about. And he started getting weepy because it was so meaningful to him that I was the one that gave him the praise from the CEO. And so, you know, I can only imagine the amount of wondering that he was doing wondering how the CEO felt about him. And so, I think that is the hidden, so I just want to say like, the benefit of praise is massive, it is motivating, it helps people continue to do their work, it shows that where they should be going, it creates great culture.

The detriment of not giving, the cost of not giving praise is very high in the sense that people are not quite sure, and they are not knowing, and they are demotivated, they hope everything is going well, they do not know. And also, when you as a CEO come and give them negative feedback or they get from anybody negative feedback as in, that meeting did not go well, you should prepare more or something, then they are just upset. And there is no counterbalancing positive feedback. So therefore, they have this warped view of what is going on like, oh, I am not very good, I did a terrible job at the meeting because you have not praise them for like a year. So, all of that is to say, that is the economics of praise as you put it, and the actual cost of praise is zero, it is like 20 seconds, it is not even. So, it is just such an incredible return on investment and I do not know why everyone does not see it as like the massive super power.

DJ: Hmm. And if I could build on that Alisa, I am also wondering, given the last year and a bit, given covid, I am guessing that when people are in remote environments, the wondering is even more because they are sort of in their own bubble, so it is even harder to figure out what your boss thinks of who you are. So, can you talk a little bit about, is there a nuance to how this plays out in a remote work context?

AC: Well, it just gets more amplified in a remote work context because to your point, they cannot just walk into the boss' office to see how he is doing. They have their own little bubble. If something does not go well, they do not get any kind of informal organic clarification, like a smile in the cafeteria or, you know, wherever they are walking out together, or no, sort of, coming back and just have a quick chat about it. They also do not have a peer sitting next to them to say, oh, it did not go well and to commiserate with. So, they are just in their own bubble. So, it is absolutely amplified during this remote environment, no questions. So, you have to be more explicit about praise and explicit even about if you are telling about something explicit about this is not the biggest deal in the world, like, I wish you had done the meeting better, I wish you prepared more, but we did not kill any babies here, do not worry, I know you should be able to fix it. So, you need to also give people a sort of a sense of encouragement even when you do have to give them difficult feedback, which is a thing that has to happen.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: There is something to be said about delivering timely good quality feedback. While there is a lot of literature out there, I want to state a couple of things here.

- 1) SBI is always a useful frame – Situation, Behaviour, Impact. This was the situation or the context where I or someone else observed this behaviour of yours and this was the impact of the behaviour on the team and the outcomes. It is important to stay away from broad brush adjectives which often aren't helpful.
- 2) The second thing to mention in the context of praise is that it is useful not just to talk about what the person is doing well but also talk a little bit about when the person comes alive and is in Flow. That often helps in the individual build a deeper level of self-awareness and it can even help career planning discussions within the company or otherwise depending on what gives the person energy.

Thank you for listening.

End of nugget transcription

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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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