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Context to the nugget conversation

Alisa speaks about how Entrepreneurs need to be thoughtful about assimilating new leaders and equip the incoming leaders with adequate context for them to succeed. She also goes on to speak about how Entrepreneurs need to re-onboard themselves as the context changes.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Moving to getting senior leaders on board as you scale up Alisa, one of the themes you talk about is when you bring senior people in, the founder needs to spend disproportionate time in transferring context. Can you talk a little bit about what all, you know, you have in mind where all the opportunities lie for a founder to transfer context to an incoming leader?

Alisa Cohn (AC): Well, transferring context is everything. I mean when an incoming leader comes in, they do not know the norms, they do not know the culture, they do not know where everything is kept, they do not know the history, so you want them to have fresh eyes, it is actually really good. But you want to share with them how, to help them get with how do we do things around here, how do we experience a win around here. You want to have them, the CEO and the founder and maybe also, an onboarding buddy, somebody else, really help them figure out how to get wins quickly, how to orient themselves quickly, who to pick, who to build a relationship with inside of the company immediately, what all the history is, what the sensitivities are. So, they understand, especially an environment, that was to your point earlier, in a remote environment, you are like, who are these people, where is everything, how do I figure out how to get myself on board and connect it into the community, how do I build the communal relationships around here. When you are the CEO and you invest the time in helping that person, there will be massive rewards for you.

DJ: Hmm. And any interesting rituals you have come across of the various clients you have worked with, any out-of-the-box thing that you have seen people do to transfer context?

AC: Well, I think, I mean, both transferring context and rituals are two different things. I think that for context, I think a ritual might be an end-of-day coffee or an end-of-day, some of my clients, whiskey with this person to see, you know, what have you learned, what questions do you have, that kind of thing. I think rituals overall inside of a company when a new person comes on board would be let us do a tour, you know, we are all remote now, so let us do a tour of your house, let us do a tour of your work environment, or here is a collage of pictures of me, of my kids, of my spouse, of my hobbies or whatever, and sort of do collages of each other, those are lovely rituals you can do as a team.

DJ: Hmm. And in a related context Alisa, you actually use an interesting term, you say that when a senior leader comes on, the founder needs to re-onboard himself or herself, you know, you say that. You talk about your conversation with Daniel, a fintech founder in New York, and you mentioned that when he brought on senior leader from the outside, there was an opportunity for him to pause and re-onboard himself. So, can you talk a little bit about this notion of re-onboarding?

AC: Yeah. You know, I spoke to, and I am now doing my own podcast called From Start-Up to Grown-Up also, and I interviewed Greg Gallant who is the founder of Muck Rack, he has been the founder and the CEO for 14 years and the company has grown, and he made the point, it is really funny that the day one of my company, I was called CEO and now 14 years later, I am so called CEO, but it is a very different job. Your job as CEO, as your company scales, changes very quickly and certainly every six to eight months and very much, every 18 months. And you might need new executives around you, you might need to really orient the way you are doing it, but literally your job changes. So, if you think about onboarding as coming onto a new role, it is very powerful for you the CEO to sort of like, walk out and come back in as the new CEO in a way and re-onboard yourself and reacquaint yourself with the way you are now or the way the company is now. By the way also, your old employees who have been with you since day one or just the early days, they see you in some ways also as that same person. So, it is very helpful also for you to help them understand how much you have changed, for you to help them understand that you are a different person and the job is different and then they have to also make those kinds of adjustments for you.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Now, this is a topic where we do have several resources at the podcast that could help you if you want to know more.

I love the point Alisa makes about how Founders need to adapt to the evolving context and possibly re-onboard themselves as the role evolves. The challenge in a lot of these situations is that when you are dealing with a continuum, it is often hard to bring in discreteness. My previous guest, Dan Pink speaks about the notion of finding punctuation marks which help us make sense of slow changes in context. Something interesting came up in my conversation with Vishy Anand (VA), the Chess Legend. He speaks about the significance of Move 40 when you play a timed Chess game.

VA: *"I will give you one quick example, I would often get to move 40 and Move 40 is a significant because it is the end of the first time control, which means you get a fresh amount of time on your clock and normally your time pressure is over, but a lot of people the time between a move 32 and 40 are so tense and they are so caught up in it they are not able to stop, they will make their 41st move any way and especially once upon a time I was very prone to this error, and I was also prone to an error when I had half an hour up and had 3 seconds I would try to play fast that he wouldn't have any time for think, it doesn't take a lot of intelligence to stop yourself that if you played fast to not give him any time to think you are not giving yourself any time think, I thought so these were two areas where I had problems, and one of the things I did was, I would simply make a mental note, I would think of some painful lose I had suffered as a result to this habits, so then when I went to the board, when I was on move 35 and my opponent down to three seconds, he is shaking and the temptations was overwhelming and I have half an hour and I don't have any pressure, I would just tell myself to get up go to the refreshment area have a little bit of water or some coffee and then I would come back and I found that this broke the tension, I became too emotionally bound to the game and this broke that and then I was able to bring some sanity in the process and especially doing this after move 40 when neither if there is any tension anymore, but just getting up going away and leaving it*

for 10 mins then you come back and you find that it resets your brain almost, so that's one technique but there are techniques like this that you learn part of your bag of tools and your tool kit."

DJ: What is our mechanism to walk away from the Board and come back? It is worth reflecting on that.

On the subject of transitions, I had an opportunity to speak to Darleen DeRosa (DD) of Spencer Stuart who speaks about Effective Transitions in the Remote world.

DD: "As an example, one CEO said, he literally would change his video background to sort of make it look like he was in his Switzerland office one day and he got off to such a fast start because rather than taking three months to travel to every office, he could do the same thing in a month and so he could have so many video meetings that were much more effective and one-on-one meetings by the way where he has bigger reach in terms of the employee population plus a number of townhalls and said, he would never go back to the way he was doing it before. That's just one example of how yes, it's harder and you have got to be more thoughtful, but there can be a lot of efficiency if you do it well. And so, we have seen some really interesting examples of organizations who have done a nice job rethinking their onboarding strategy. So, sending people care packages to help them understand the culture of the organization even before they join and sending care packages. So, it's not like you are just getting a laptop, you are getting things that help you understand and learn about the company. We have seen some organizations hiring and creating new roles to really think about onboarding and culture."

DJ: The more I spend time in this space, the more I realize that the derailments rarely happen because of the gap in the new leader coming upto speed on the What of the business. More often than not, the derailments happen because the leader hasn't acclimatized on the How of the business.

If you want to dig in more, you can look up the Conversation with Michael Watkins who is one of the leading thinkers in Transition Acceleration. You might also like the conversation with R Gopalakrishnan who has written the book Crash which profiles 15 high profile CEO appointments that led to derailment. You might also find the Curated Playlist – Settling into a new Context. You can find all these resources at playtopotential.com.

The metaphor I use with the Founders is that when you are procuring new seeds, getting the high quality seed is only one part of the problem. You need to ensure that you take care of the soil, the fertilizer and the climate for the Seed to grow into a plant and a tree. And that, I often notice, is left to chance!

Thank you for listening.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Darleen DeRosa that is referenced: [Transitioning remotely](#).

Nugget from Vishy Anand that is referenced: [Understanding the processor inside](#).

RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

Settling into a new context: Figuring out “where to go” is only a part of the challenge for leaders in transition. How you land effectively in a new context is as critical. Hair line cracks often become full blown fractures if not attended to carefully. Leaders talk about some key lessons Individuals could bear in mind as they transition across contexts (Army to Business world, US to India, MNC to Family Business, Consulting to Industry/Investing etc.) You can access the playlist [here](#).

Entrepreneurship: We are seeing a renaissance when it comes to entrepreneurship in this country. But it is not an easy ride. Leaders speak about how individuals should think about taking the plunge to entrepreneurship, how they could pick co-founders, their approach to scaling up their leadership muscle and more. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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Alisa Cohn - Nuggets

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- 90.03 Alisa Cohn - Policing your passion
- 90.04 Alisa Cohn - Imposter syndrome as a founder
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- 90.06 Alisa Cohn - Economics of praise
- 90.07 Alisa Cohn - Handling Leadership transitions
- 90.08 Alisa Cohn - Co-founder dynamics

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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