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Context to the nugget conversation

Thomas says that designers distinguish between features and benefits, negotiators distinguish between positions and interests and policy experts between outputs and outcomes. He expands on the nuance here around focusing on the underlying and not getting swept away by surface level considerations.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Just moving forward, one of the things you say in the book which really caught my attention and I quote from the book, you say, designers distinguish between features and benefits, negotiators distinguish between positions and interests and policy works between outputs and outcomes, talk to us about what is the nuance here.

Thomas Wedell-Wedellsborg (TW): To me, the insight here is that no matter what fields you work with, if you look at the professionals, especially professionals who solve problems for others, well, then they typically have some kind of language recognizing this. So in the policy world, you go in and you say, hey, we need to build a courthouse in this region and then everybody focuses on that because we can look at it when it is done, that is kind of the output, what is the ultimate outcome you want. And that is probably not a courthouse, that is better justice in the region which can be a different problem to solve for compared to the simpler one of hey, how do we build a building. So that is in one area, you see it almost, no matter what industry you work with, you will discover that there is some recognition of the need to unpack a goal or a problem like, okay, you want to become an author, why do you want to become an author. Well, there may be a component about spreading good ideas, there may be a component about wanting to get on talk shows, maybe a component about identity, I want to be somebody who is, like, recognized smart having written a book, still, like, the classic way of signaling in that and so on. And your why questions, that really needs to be surfaced before you can do effective problem solving, lets you just start attacking the most immediate thing that may not actually deliver on what you truly want.

DJ: Hmm, really powerful. And this came through in one of my conversations with a gentleman called Stew Friedman from Wharton, and he talks about four domains of life, how do you think about yourself which is your physical mental health, spiritual health, how you think about your time at work, how you think about your family and how you think about your community. And he says that you need to think about this four-piece jigsaw in a meaningful way as you go through life. But he goes on to say that it is one thing for you to figure out the jigsaw for yourself but your family might not be aligned with where you want to go and you want to carry them along and he says, how do you do that. There he says, you do not talk about positions, you talk about interests, you do not say I will spend an hour with the kids, no, you really say, if I have to be an affectionate father, what

are the different mechanisms and really solve for the primary need and not for the surface commitment which is maybe you might have a ritual saying I will have maybe one meal with the family in a restaurant every week but you do not want to take it literally, you want to distill it to what exactly is the need we are solving and maybe have a conversation with your spouse and with the other people around you to get into an equilibrium, so it came up in that context.

TW: I will share an example from my own life which is, I do not have children yet, I do have nieces and nephews and they live in a different country. They live in Denmark where I am originally from and I am based in the U.S. and so it is difficult to stay connected to them. And one thing I was tempted to do is go, well, whenever they have a birthday or Christmas, I will just give them a really nice present. But then, I realized that that is a nice symbol but really what I wanted to do was actually to connect with them. And so I started thinking of gifts that I could give them while we were together, so basic stuff but like taking them out shopping, go out and spend a couple of hours shopping with your niece and that was a gift to her and it was a gift to me and it is something we start suddenly trying, like, building a little bit of connection, even though that I am away most of the time and that problem, a lovely present wrapped in a nice paper whatever would not solve. So a simple example of thinking about the outcomes, your interests, if you will, versus what you said, the position or immediate stated thing we are looking at.

DJ: Very true Thomas. If I may share that triggers and other anecdote, I am a part of a WhatsApp group, multiple WhatsApp groups but couple of them are my batch mates from my high school, batch mates from my engineering college and so on, and typically, we would observe that people are wishing happy birthday, happy birthday, happy birthday on the day of somebody's birthday. Then one of them turned around and said, why do not we ask the birthday boy or girl to just write an update on their life once a year, you just write an update. The idea is for us to stay connected to each other's lives and understand what is going on. So why do not we just turn this bland meaningless ritual into something a little more purposeful. And then, we started people saying, we sing or we like cooking or we like sailing or we like hiking and then, that triggers a chain of real conversations around interests, around passions, around pain points in some cases. So you are right, there is an opportunity for us to question the rituals and really ask what are we solving for in that mode of interaction.

TW: And I love that example. That is such a good example of a super simple habit that has specific triggers, namely when it is my birthday, I write a short update on what is going on in my life, much better than what you are suggesting there. So this makes me think of something important I realize with problem solving that in some sense, we tend to focus on our biggest problems like oh, I have this either a strategic challenge I am facing right now or a very difficult key client or maybe this career consideration I am in the middle of. But really, problem solving is a thinking skill that if you get good at it, you can start to apply it to even very small things. And just by virtue of finding smarter solutions to small things, you start to generate a much better surplus to tackle some of the bigger problems as well. So to me, it is really ultimately a mindset that you go and you relentlessly apply to anything from strategic problems to how do we stay connected with my high school batch or the university batch you are dealing with, really interesting example.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: In the conversation, I refer to an insight I learnt from Stew Friedman (SF) of Wharton who has studied Work Life Integration of decades. Here is the insight from him around understanding underlying interests rather than positions.

SW: *“DJ: You talk about, in stake holder dialogue you say that expectations are often stated as positions and not as interest; I found that quite thought provoking could you expand on that a little bit?”*

SF: *Well, putting this part in the program together we borrowed heavily from modern negotiations theory and that’s where this notion comes from. So, if you read the great Roger Fischer and Bill Yury (Getting to Yes) which is one of the fundamental work in their field you learn about special positions now at interest the base criteria there is what you want to find out from people as you trying to discover new ways of doing things that are good for both of you or agreements that are and going to work for both of you win wins you have got to get passed the positioning to the underlying interest so what you really care about? Well, I want to be ... more, ok! But what’s really important for you? Well, I needed you to be around more, ok! Why is it important to you? So that I know you care about me, that I know you love me. Then you have my interest in mind and then you are going to do everything you can to protect me and to nurture me. Oh OK! Well, let’s talk about the different ways then I can make that happen even when I am not here. So, he starts to talk about all kinds of creative possibilities, instead of arguing over when you are home, it’s not too much about when you are home it’s about where your heart is? And where your mind is? When you are with people who matter most and this goes off course for people that work and in the community as well and so another thing that we found is says not so much seem out of the time that parents spend with their kids that affects their mental health, their emotional health it’s the quality of that time. Am I present? And for moms, especially for mothers it was a matter of again not the amount of time they spend with their children and in fact the more time that mothers spent on their own self-care the better of their children were in terms of their mental health and that of course is because when you take care of yourself as a mother you better able to take your kids when you need to.”*

DJ: Back to what Thomas says, focusing on the underlying and not really getting carried away by the surface level manifestation is good advice in general!

Thank you for listening.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Stewart Friedman that is referenced: [Managing stakeholder expectations](#).

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Thomas Wedell-Wedellsborg - Nuggets

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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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Podcast Transcript [92.05 Thomas Wedell-Wedellsborg - Focusing on the underlying](#)

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