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Context to the nugget conversation

Thomas speaks about the criticality of labelling emotions that the other person is experiencing and that could be an opportunity to get to a better place.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Moving forward Thomas, you say that sometimes while handling a tricky situation like a hostage crisis rather than asking an explicit question about what they want, we are actually better off labeling a fear, you know, saying it seems like, dot dot dot, something that they might harbor to get to a better solution, I found again the link between a hostage situation and framing quite interesting, so can you say more about this piece?

Thomas Wedell-Wedellsborg (TW): This is an insight from Chris Voss who wrote the book, Never Split The Difference, it is a book about negotiation and he has been a hostage negotiator for the FBI. And he talks about this method of labeling which is, the function of labeling is to put emotions into play, like, normally we are discussing something and the emotions of what is going on are unaddressed or are lurking in the background. What he would do, and there is a quite interesting anecdote or approach, you know, he is called in, somebody has locked themselves in an apartment with a gun and there is hostages and they do not want to go back to jail which is what will happen if the police comes in, and he just found, instead of starting to say, hey, you need to come out or all of the demands and all that, you just start saying, hey, it seems like you are really worried about us coming in shooting, it seems like you are really worried about the idea of going back to jail. And according to him, it does something magical in the conversation, it just allows you to put the, not just the facts but also the emotions on the table, so you can start working on that too. So a very simple technique here, not for when you are in hostage negotiations I hope, but when you are dealing with a conflict and you are perceiving something that is going on emotionally, then you might say, hey, it seems like you are a bit upset about what just happened here and then just see how they respond. They might say no, they might say, no no, you got that wrong, I am not upset, I am just going to, of the stuff going on, but by saying that, it seems that or it is it looks like, you create an opening for them to confirm or disconfirm what is going on in their heads.

DJ: Hmm, it is a beautiful insight. It opens a window to a deeper and a more authentic conversation in terms of what really matters to the other person, what is not being said, and sometimes, back to your earlier point about outside in, sometimes the person himself or herself may not be aware that they are coming across in a certain way and showing the mirror sometimes can get them to bring it to that awareness and elicit a better response or a better situation.

TW: Yeah. I love that actually that people, to different degrees, can be aware of their own reactions. You can suddenly notice, hey, wait, I notice I am feeling very tense, why is that. Even just self-observing, for that matter, can be helpful.

DJ: I have a condition called hangar, when I am hungry, I get irritated and restless. And sometimes, you know, once my wife started pointing out saying it seems like you are hungry, then I know, okay, that is sort of setting off a chain reaction and sometimes, you know, then you get into the auto correct mode.

TW: That is one of the examples I share in the book. So the book mixes business problems and personal problems because I found that, of course problem solving applies equally to both, and this story of my friend Tanya and her husband Brian who used to, a great marriage, they are still married and they had a lot of fights, fights that got worse than they needed to be over small things. And they initially started saying, well, we are from two different countries, so maybe it is a cultural thing or it could be a values blah blah blah, and none of that helped until they started just noticing from the bright spots, hey, was there ever a time when we did not have this problem, even though it normally would have arisen, like what are the positive exceptions to this. And they just noticed, well, the budget is normally very sensitive to discuss, we normally fight over, only this day we did not and why, because unusually we did not have the discussion in the evening, we had it in the morning. And why was that important, well, hanger or tiredness, you know, when you are past 10 o'clock in the evening, if you are discussing something sensitive, nobody has the mental energy to take a positive approach to that. You do not want to discuss problems when you are hangry or when you are angry and tired.

DJ: Hangered.

TW: Yeah, exactly. Very basic idea of starting to notice these patterns and saying, oh, there is actually a smart approach here, instead of trying to change who we are, just change what time we discuss sensitive matters.

DJ: Hmm, very true. At a personal level, one of the guests on the podcast was Matthew Walker who has written the book, Why We Sleep and he talks about circadian rhythms which is sort of people's body clocks. So in my home, I have got the body clock of a morning person and my wife has a body clock of an evening person, a late-night person rather, and when we look back, some of the best conversations we have had was a period of a few months when I was in India and she was in the U.S.

TW: Oh, I love that.

DJ: So I would call it in my morning and she would be in a really good frame and I said, you know, this went by and after about a few weeks, we said, this seems to be a lot more energizing than when we are in person. And then we sort of said, actually, it is possibly because our body clocks are perfectly adjusted when we are in these time zones.

TW: I love that. I mean that solution sounds like it comes with other drawbacks though, the long-distance relationship.

DJ: Not to indicate it is a solution but at least, once it came into our awareness, we said, let us not discuss anything of significance either first thing in the morning or last thing at night.

TW: Yeah, I love that.

DJ: Anything between lunch and tea time is generally a good time.

TW: It almost goes like, when you have meetings in different time zones as those time zone planners when you can see, oh, here we are both greens and here it was like, oh no, here you are red, I know that.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: When I was at EgonZehnder, we would often interview candidates as pairs. One of my colleagues would often employ an effective tactic. When a candidate is speaking about a certain work experience tentatively, my colleague would stop him and put him on the spot by saying something like “Looks like that was not a very fulfilling stint or you seem to be defensive about what happened there”. Suddenly we would notice that the floodgates would open and the candidate would share openly and we would have a very different conversation about how they feel about various stints. I feel that when we do this, we help people get in touch with the emotion they are feeling in the moment and heighten their level of awareness and it can lead to a more powerful conversation.

Very often people may not realise but they get carried away in the heat of the moment, and direct them back to the emotion they feel in the moment. It’s a fine line though, it is critical that the person on the other side doesn’t feel patronized. I can imagine some situations where if this is not done well and thoughtfully, the person on the other side could get wound up even more.

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End of nugget transcription

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Thomas Wedell-Wedellsborg - Nuggets

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- 92.04 Thomas Wedell-Wedellsborg - Presented vs Open-ended problems
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- 92.06 Thomas Wedell-Wedellsborg - Teaching Reframing to kids
- 92.07 Thomas Wedell-Wedellsborg - Eliciting authentic responses
- 92.08 Thomas Wedell-Wedellsborg - Labeling emotions
- 92.09 Thomas Wedell-Wedellsborg - Problem framing and Coaching

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 [92.08 Thomas Wedell-Wedellsborg - Labeling emotions](#)

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