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## Context to the nugget conversation

Ethan speaks about the role of rituals in helping us manage chatter. He goes on to speak about how Champions like Rafael Nadal take the help of rituals in managing their mind when they play tennis at the highest level. He also speaks about the role of rituals in coping with transitions.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And you talk about Rafael Nadal in the book, I guess, he fits that example of sort of really organizing your right from the water bottles when you when you are sort of taking a break between games, right?

Ethan Kross (EK): That is exactly right. Nadal is... Nadal is a really interesting example. He is one of the greatest tennis players of all time, if not the greatest, I guess it depends where your allegiances lie but...

DJ: I am still in the Federer camp but yeah, I would have to grudgingly admit... yeah...

EK: Let us give it a couple more years and during an interview several years ago a journalist, sorry, I think, I believe, it was a journalist, I asked him what was the hardest thing he struggled with on the tennis court? And his answer surprised a lot of people because he didn't say the hardest thing, he struggled with was maintaining his endurance or returning his opponent's backhand, it was managing the voice inside his head. It was the mind game that was the most difficult component for him. And if you have ever watched him play you actually know what he does to manage that chatter. Nadal is famous for engaging in elaborate rituals. So, from the time he walks on to the court, how he carries his bag and walks to his bench to the way he positions his water bottles, to the routines he engages in before every single serve, he's highly ritualistic and when asked why he does that, he has said and something to the effect of I order my surroundings to match the order I seek in my head. So, he is using this tool. I should add that this is an ancient tool. I mean ancient in the sense that cultures have relied on rituals to help deal with chatter provoking experiences for quite a long time. Like mourning the loss of a loved one, how do you deal with that uncertainty and distress? Well, cultures don't wait for you to figure out the answer to that question; they give it right to you. But I know exactly what ritual I should engage in when someone close to me passes away. And so, this is a way that society has evolved to help us manage chatter, it's one way that it has helped us evolve. So, I think, rituals are fascinating, there is a caveat people often ask, hey, wait a second, what about things like obsessive compulsive disorder and certain kinds of anxiety disorders that are characterized by rituals and my response to that is there are certainly cases in which rituals can be over-relied on and overused to the point that they become harmful. If you feel that you have to perform a ritual and if you don't perform it, something bad is going to happen and that becomes

destructive to your life; that is not good. But in that sense a ritual is really no different from many other tools which if taken to an extreme can be harmful. If you think about the kinds of tools we are talking about as akin to a physical tool, I think this all comes full picture. So, if you think about a hammer as an example, a hammer can be the source of enormous innovation and creativity like I am sitting in a home right now that was built largely by a hammer. Hammer being used to erect the home I live in but a hammer can also be the source of destruction if it is used in the wrong context or the wrong degree. So, what we want to figure out is how to use these tools appropriately in the right proportions and that is something I think the science can help us figure out.

DJ: Got it. One of the things you said triggered something, you spoke about rituals to manage chatter. I think the other thing I have noticed is around key phases of transition, whether it's in the transition in the context of losing someone or even in our phases of life when you move from being a bachelor to getting married or different transitions, I find that they are often marked with rituals. It's interesting that you frame it as an opportunity to manage chatter; I hadn't quite framed it that way, positioned as a celebratory, in some cases celebratory, in some cases grieving, but chatter is an interesting frame to see the need or the use case for some of these rituals.

EK: Yeah, I think that is the activator of many of these tools. So, we, like transition periods are we know that these are among the most stressful times of life that human beings experience and many of us seem to reflexively engage in tools to help us deal with that kind of uncertainty that surrounds those transitions. I find it fascinating that many of us intuit what to do without really knowing why or how. And so, in my book I talk about close to 30 different tools. I think, some people may have spontaneously stumbled on some of those tools in their lives without knowing why, but they have used some of them. And my hope is that educating people about the science surrounding those tools, what it gives people the prospect of doing is being more deliberate so that you don't have to wait to stumble on a tool, but you can rather be more proactive and how you utilize it. So, to make that concrete, whereas, before I knew about all of this science, I might, find myself organizing when I really overcome with chatter not knowing why I just kind of reflexively do it now. I know immediately as soon as I see the chatter begin to brew, I have got a plan, I start cleaning up a little bit, I do some other things and what that has done for me is it shortens the amount of time that I spend in chatter; I am able to bypass it before it elevates and that is a great service that knowing about the science provides.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: It is fascinating to see the role that rituals can play in transitions. Let me refer to the Covid context when we were all working from homes and people were feeling overwhelmed with pressures at work, home, health and so on. Must have been around June 2020. This is Peak Covid when people were beginning to feel burnt out and fatigued. I was chatting with one of my Coachees about how he was handling this blurring of boundaries between work and home and the fact that he was not getting any time for decompression. He said he had a ritual that worked for him. When I asked him to elaborate, he mentioned that everyday around 6 or 7 pm, when his work-day ended, he would change his clothes and go for a 45 odd min walk around the block (almost the same time as what his commute would take) and come back home to engage afresh as a spouse and as a parent. He said that while we were context switching through the day, he was predominantly in work mode from 9 to 7 pm and doing this ritual established the boundary in his mind but also in the mind of the people around him. Just a simple example of how rituals can sometimes help in transitions even if it is transitioning contexts in a day.

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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