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Context to the nugget conversation

Ethan speaks about how Journaling, more specifically, Expressive Writing can act as a distancing mechanism, provide closure and act as a meaning making mechanism to some of the Chatter we experience in our lives.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): The other piece that got my attention, Ethan, was you talk about journaling. You say that even simply asking people to write about their most negative experiences for 15-20 minutes leads them to feel better, visit the doctor less and have a healthier immune function. Can you talk about the link between journaling, psychological distance and well-being?

Ethan Kross (EK): Yeah, so when we are talking about journaling in technical terms, we are talking about expressive writing which involves describing and writing your deepest thoughts and feelings surrounding a negative experience. And what we have learned over time is that creating a narrative around one's experience can often be really useful because what it does is it helps people put a structure on their experience, is they telling a story and stories usually have beginnings, middles and importantly ends. And so, telling those stories can provide us with a sense of closure and meaning that ultimately allow us to move on with our lives. There is some research, this is some work that we have done in our lab that has looked at links between journaling and distancing. One of the interesting things about writing about your own life is that you become the character in a story. So, an author is actually writing about a character but the character is you, so there does seem to be a distancing function that expressive writing has, you are almost stepping back and writing about your own life and there is a distancing feature associated with that. But there is lots of research which is that expressive writing can be very helpful; it's another tool in the chatter toolbox.

DJ: And when you say expressive writing, just for me to understand the nuance here, it's about expressing emotions around events...

EK: It's about writing about your deepest thoughts and feelings about an experience and like... so, that is the instruction that is given to participants in many expressive writing studies. And what eventually happens when you do that for 15 to 20 minutes for anywhere from one to three consecutive days, is that people start to tell stories about the event. So, they are going deep, they are going into it and they are creating these narratives which have increasingly some senses of coherence, meaning and structure and those narratives can be helpful.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: A related point about journaling came up in my conversation with Rajiv Vij, Author of Inside Out Leadership. He speaks about how we need to be non-judgmental when it comes to journaling. He emphasizes the need for self-acceptance in these situations.

RV: *"I mean there are various techniques to reflect, meditation, journaling, positive affirmations, visualization, bunch of different ideas, but when we look at journaling, and it is quite true for meditation as well, but let us stick on journaling, the idea is that what we need to develop when we talk of developing self-awareness, we need to develop non-judgmental self-awareness and why I say that? So, for example, you recognize, you know, let us say you are journaling and you are recognizing routinely that you are, you know, lately you have been very irritable or lately, you have been feeling a bit down or lately, you have been a bit envious, whatever that feeling maybe, so that is a feeling that we want to become aware of. But what is your natural tendency though, you know, we all tend to judge ourselves, and I will come back to the point, we judge ourselves because there is a sense of incompleteness, inadequacy within us. And we are constantly trying to fill that void and that is why we are judging, are we on track, are we not on track and so forth, and it is that judgmental nature which forces us automatically to judge others as well, which we do all the time, including our loved ones, our kids and so forth. And that makes things worse. So, when we are talking about journaling or meditation and non-judgmental awareness, the idea is, so let us say you recognize that envy and the sadness and the irritability. If we judge it and we say, oh, you know, why do I feel like that, what is wrong with me, I am not a good person, how could I be envious or I am, you know, I talk about being a coach, how could I be feeling sad, I thought I was in the business of happiness, etc., etc., what do you think is going to happen to you? Do you think you are going to feel better or worse? Clearly, you are going to feel worse. So, what you are doing is, you know, it is like your child, Deepak, who walks in and says, you know, hypothetically, oh, I am in middle school and you know, these two kids in my class, they are such bullies and they are so rude and you know kids do not like me and all that kind of stuff. Now, what are you going to do? You want to reassure your child, you want to sit them down and say no, it is okay, it is totally fine, you know, kids are kids and they do different things but you are a wonderful person and you are so good in so many ways and so on and so forth. But when we are thinking that, oh, I have been sad, we are not reassuring ourselves, we are actually making it worse. It is like telling the child that, oh, yeah, how could you do that, how could people not like you, what is wrong with you. That is just making it worse. So, the starting point of all meditation and journaling and things like that is to create a non-judgmental space because that is what is going to create greater self-acceptance, greater self-love, and all of that is actually automatically going to heal us from that void of the sense of inadequacy and incompleteness because we start to then accept ourselves for who we are."*

DJ: If there is one habit that I have seen in common amidst several great leaders at the top, it is some sort of a journaling habit that helps them makes sense of the world around them and curate the signal from the noise.

Thank you for listening. If you want to learn more, you can go to playtopotential.com and visit the Curated Playlist section and look up the Playlist on Journaling.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Rajiv Vij that is referenced: [Self-acceptance before Self Improvement.](#)

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Journaling: Leaders across contexts share their perspectives on how they reflect and take notes as they go through life. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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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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