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## Context to the nugget conversation

Ethan speaks about how we could be effective in helping people deal with Chatter. He suggests that while we need to play a role of empathizing and listening to allow the person to vent, we also need to consider providing some coaching or widening of their perspective so that they could move forward. He speaks about the few people that he calls Chatter Advisors that he turns to where he gets a healthy balance of listening and Sounding Board support when he experiences Chatter. He speaks about some of the characteristics that leads them to be on his Speed Dial.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): The other theme that was interesting, Ethan, was you talk about how we provide support effectively when somebody is going through a rough patch and you say that we need to offer the right balance of listening and empathy and problem-solving. Once again, to understand how we walk that tightrope, I was curious about how you think about offering support if you are on the receiving end of chatter, what's your experience on that front?

Ethan Kross (EK): Well, I think this is a really important issue because in popular culture we are often told that what you want to do when you are experiencing chatter is just find someone to vent your emotions, you just get it out and there has been a lot of research on this process and what we have learned is that venting can be really helpful for strengthening the friendship and relational bonds between two people. It feels good to know there are other people there who are willing to take the time to listen and connect with us. The problem of venting is if all you do in a conversation is vent about your problems, you often leave that conversation just as upset, if not more upset, as when you start it, because all you have done is kept the negative stuff active in your minds. The best conversations when it comes to chatter allow us to do two things. First, it is important to find someone who allows us to express our feelings to a certain degree, establishing those relational empathy connections is really useful. But at a certain point in the conversation, the person you are speaking with ideally helps broaden your perspective. They help you look at that bigger picture in ways that ultimately allow you to find meaning and reach a sense of closure that allows you to move on. So, there is this balance between wanting to talk to people who can both empathize and connect but also help coach you through the problem. And I call those people in my life my chatter advisors and I don't have many, but I have enough and I think the take home here for listeners is two-fold. Its number one, if you are experiencing chatter, be really thoughtful about who you speak about it because speaking to anyone isn't necessarily going to be helpful. There are some people in my life who I am extremely close with, I love them, I respect them, I never talk to them about my chatter, because I know that the way that they are going to try to help me is by just allowing me to vent, which isn't going to serve me in the long term. So, the people I talk to instead are the three to five people who I know are adept at not just listening and getting me to vent but also helping broaden

my perspective. And so, I have got those people on my speed dial list and it's a resource that I avail myself of when I am struggling. So, that is one take home. The second take home is if you are on the other side of the equation and someone is coming to you, a colleague, a loved one for chatter support, be mindful of these two principles: take the time to listen and connect, but at a certain point in the conversation, when you see your opening, try to help them work through that experience. Now, there is an art to doing this well; I wish I could tell listeners. Okay, the thing you want to do is listen and let them vent for 96 seconds and then shift into problem-solving. It doesn't work this way. We are way too complicated to expect it to be that simple. I think it does disjustice to the beauty of the human condition. So, the art to doing this well involves taking the time to listen and connect and then sometimes it can be apparent when you should start shifting into that coaching mode, but if it's not, my suggestion is to ask the person you are talking to, hey, I totally get it but I have an idea, can I ask you a question? Sometimes, I will pose that question to someone I am talking with and they will say, please, yes, tell me, what do you think, or where should I, what should I do about this, that is why I am talking to you. Sometimes, I will be ready for that feedback. Other conversations, the person I am talking to would say, no, I am not ready yet. And that is fine because depending on the person and the circumstance they are dealing with some people may need to spend more time in that empathy zone before they are ready to shift into the cognitive zone. But those are the principles of providing and receiving good chatter support.

DJ: And back to your point about having, let's say, four to five chatter advisors on your speed dial, is there, if you had to sort of think about what sort of the, what are the three-four characteristics, unifying characteristics that they possess, are there things that stand out?

EK: There is, there are, there is, there is either an implicit or explicit awareness of how these principles operate. And what I mean by that is, there is some people on this list who have what you might describe as a high socio-emotional intelligence factor. They are in tune to the fact that the emotional connection is really important, but that you also need to help people actually concretely deal with problems and find solutions. Some people for reasons we don't know maybe some have it in-built or absorb from their early childhood experiences just have that intuition. There are a couple of people on the list like that. But then there are other folks on the list you actually are aware of this and these are colleagues, friends who are psychologically oriented and know how this stuff works and for that reason are quite deliberate in how they talk to you about these things. Now, I should add the people on this list, they are not doing therapy, there may be a therapist on it but just as a matter of coincidence I am friends with one, it's not a formal therapeutic exchange. What we are talking about in many ways is having really powerful relationships that you can rely on to help you work through chatter provoking circumstances. Other people are in an ideal position to help us because they have distance from the problem. They can be that objective guidepost that we can lean on. And so, it's just a matter of finding the right individuals who are capable of actualizing the potential they have.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: As Ethan says, it is quite tricky indeed to figure out when we should transition from a listening and allowing to vent mode to a problem-solving mode. I grapple with it all the time whether it is in my Coaching work or in my day to day conversations with the people around me. Recently, my teenage daughter came and spoke to me about an episode at school where she was at the receiving end of cyber-bullying. I realized that I had gotten into problem solving mode too soon when my wife cautioned me to listen and allow her to vent before we gave her suggestions to cope with the situation. Thankfully the situation got resolved without too much collateral damage thanks to some timely help from the School. I guess, we have several conversations in our daily life where we have

to make the choice of listening and allowing venting and problem solving. As Ethan says, no magic pill here but the best we can do I guess is to be fully aware and present to how the other person is feeling through the conversation and using that as a cue to transition from the emotional side to the cognitive side.

Thank you for listening.

## End of nugget transcription

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### Ethan Kross - Nuggets

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- 96.02 Ethan Kross - Defining Chatter

- 96.03 Ethan Kross - Rafael Nadal and Rituals
- 96.04 Ethan Kross - Inner voice vs Inner chatter
- 96.05 Ethan Kross - Time travel, Distancing and Awe
- 96.06 Ethan Kross - Inner voice - Zooming feature of our minds
- 96.07 Ethan Kross - Journaling and Chatter
- 96.08 Ethan Kross - Allowing Venting Vs 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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