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Context to the nugget conversation

David speaks about how critical it is for us to tune into what we are feeling at various points in the day. Not just for the surges in emotions but the mild emotions that are often humming in us through our day that we may not be present to.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And a related question here, David is very often when you are in the heat of a moment of an interaction, very often we aren't mindful of how we are coming across, you know, a lot of let's say the if we stick with this metaphor of the net, I would imagine some of the stuff that transpires is often in the blind spot of that person; I don't even know that I am doing this. Any reflections on that just in terms of tuning in to what's going on?

David Bradford (DB): Well, I'll answer that in a minute, but I think the bigger problem is we often don't know what we feel. And I think we need to start being aware of our feelings and not infrequently when Carole and I work with each other and we get into our own disagreements, one of us will say, wait a minute, I am not sure I know what I am feeling and we stop and we sort of ask ourselves, I am wondering what I did. So, that's the major problem. When you are talking about blind spots, one of the interesting things about this mode of interaction is if we can get into a conversation, I am likely to discover my blind spots. So, let's say, and again I am making this up, you are not giving me enough real data that I can use, you are too nice. So, I am going to make this up. So, let's assume that you have done something that's really bothering me. I say, hey Deepak, I really feel hurt by that and so on. And you say, Gee, I am sorry and then you might say, see what's interesting David is this is the third time that you said that, I wonder what's going on. Well, that might get me to reflect. You are not telling me what you think is going on because you realize you don't know but you are puzzled, you say David, what's going on. And I might say, oh, what I have realized is that I can say I tend to get competitive particularly with men. So, I am learning something, I am not only learning the impact of my behavior but I am learning something about me. So, I don't have to have it all figured out. What we say is if you know your feelings and you could identify the behavior you are 90% there.

DJ: Let's talk about that David. We are all taught language in a formal way. English, the alphabet, the grammar. Tell us a little bit about the vocabulary of emotions, you know, where do we start and what's a good place for us to get a sense of what the wheel of emotions looks like. Is there an approach that you suggest for people to start building that vocabulary?

DB: Like it's two things. One is, we would say well, buy the book and then the appendix is a long list of emotions but that's not nearly as helpful as what is really helpful is as you go through the day stop

and say, I wonder what I am feeling; we almost always are feeling something. Usually, it is at such a low level it doesn't register unless somebody cuts us off the road and we get into anger. But if you start to do that, you will start to say, hmm, I am feeling a little worried about this upcoming meeting, hmm, I am really feeling looking forward to meeting with my colleague. Hmm, I am really hoping that and now you are starting to be more in touch with those low-level feelings which often aren't low level but are ones that we have pushed down because we sort of have been trained beware of feelings, leave feelings out of it, emotions have no place, but emotions are everywhere.

DJ: And at some level this requires a certain level of mindfulness, is that the right way to frame it to observe ourselves to observe the others? What do you suggest to leaders?

DB: Can I... let me break in?

DJ: Please.

DB: What I would really stress is mindfulness about ourselves. Mindfulness about others gets us into story making up. We may want be observer of others, gee, that person went silent, that person seemed to frown. Can we observe their behavior and responses but not be mindfulness about I wonder what's going on with them because that leads you down a dark rabbit hole of the stories you are making up. Now I cut you all.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I love the distinction that David makes about being mindful about ourselves but being an observer of others and not going down a dark rabbit holes of stories that we start conjuring up. A related topic came up in my conversation with Tasha Eurich (TE), a lady who has studied Self-Awareness for several years. She speaks about how easily we can go down the rabbit hole of rumination if we ask the wrong question to ourselves.

TE: *"it's not that the introspection in into a self is bad it's just that the way most of us introspect is completely wrong and the best way to illustrate this you know it gone without having two hours to delve into it is to think about probably what the common introspective question is for most people which is the question "Why". So we might be trying to understand why we are in a bad mood you know you could say why am I so upset after that conversation with my co-worker or we might be trying to understand a bad outcome you know like why didn't I get that promotion or we might be even trying to understand why be believe what we believe you know why do I want that promotion but as it turns out those questions not only the do lead us away from true insight about ourselves they give us a false sense of confidence about our knowledge so for example Sigmund Freud was wrong he believed in his work that people could access their unconscious right so like really why am I upset if I just excavate if I just think long and hard and ask that why question I can find the answer. But what has research has shown for decades actually is that no matter how hard we try we can't access so many of those things it's what I mentioned earlier about the behaviour and emotion and knowledge blindness. So, what happens is we find an answer that feels true even its wrong so that an example of where I can lead us away from the truth rather than towards it. Another reason why a really dangerous question is introspectively is it has been shown over and over and over to depress us you know you think about like why I didn't get that promotion. If you are not careful you can start asking question where the answers are well because I'm just a fundamentally bad person and who would want to promote me and you can kind of get stuck in I call it the rabbit hole of rumination and so what we wanted to do in our study was understand if why is the wrong question what is the right question you know what are these unicorns doing differently than the rest of us and it took us a little*

while to find this pattern but we discovered that when unicorns introspected they almost never asked why question they asked what questions and at first sight I thought ohh that just a weird sort of fluke or weird nuance but as we started to look into it started to make a huge amount of sense. So, one example would be you are going back to the question why I didn't get that promotion unicorns if they were in that situation wouldn't ask themselves that question. Here is some question they might have asked instead. What did I learnt that can help me be better positioned in the future? Or what can I do to close the gap between you know where I thought I was and where I need to be? Or what support can I enlist from the people around me to help me you know to achieve this goal the next time I set it? Or they are going back to why am I so upset about that conversation with my co-worker they might instead ask what part of that situation did I own or what can I do differently in the future to avoid that kind of conversation with that person and so what we found was asking "What" instead of "Why" really helps us avoid so many of the pit falls of introspection where we you know what excavating for the truth that we are never gone find and we are focusing on our problem and feeling victimized and disempowered. So I think what I have loved about that is a really tangible tool that I think we can take away it seems subtle but the difference is huge and I am speaking from personal experience. I have started to use that as well."

DJ: If it is hard for us to understand our why, going back to what David says, we can very well imagine how far off the mark we might be in trying to decipher another person's Why? As he says, we may do well to focus only on others' behaviours and not try to second-guess the other person's intent.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Tasha Eurich that is referenced: [Limitations of introspection](#).

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David Bradford - 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 [97.04 David Bradford - Building an emotional vocabulary](#)

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