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Context to the nugget conversation

David speaks about the limitations of the feedback sandwich where the detailed negative feedback is often sandwiched between cursory positive feedback. He speaks about a better way of delivering direct feedback with empathy.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I wanted to go back to one of the things you mentioned David in the context of feedback. In the book you also talk about the feedback sandwich and you talk about the limitations of the feedback sandwich where you start with something positive, quickly tick that box and move to the brutal part of the brutally honest thing that you said and then close out with a token positive comment. Can you talk a little bit about how you have observed this and sort of the limitations of this kind of a shallow approach?

David Bradford (DB): It's not the limitations. It's dysfunctional. Anyways. Well, first, there is research to show that when you do that the other person never hears the positive. They are waiting, they know what's coming. So, you are wasting your time. The second thing is you are manipulating the other person. And it doesn't help a relationship to feel manipulated because I am trying to loosen you up with this good compliment. It is also I think insulting. It says, oh you are such a fragile person, I have got to do this. Recently, I was doing another podcast and the person said, my father would say to me Joe, I have a bone to pick with you. That's a wonderful way to start. You are laying out what the issue is and you are owning it, I have a bone to pick. You could say there's something going on that's bothering me, I am upset at what you are doing; I want to talk about it, or you are doing some stuff, which I think it is hurting you. I am being straightforward about saying there's an issue here and this is the issue which I am involved with, I am bothered, I am worried, I am unhappy. And if you also cannot have built up stories where you have demonized the other, can you say this with the intention even though you are annoyed but you want to be helpful. So, this is why I keep on saying you can be very direct. If I say, again I am making this up, Deepak, I am really bothered on what you are doing and this is hurting us and I think it is hurting you. I don't have to soften you up; I am laying out what it is. And then I name the behavior and I say, this is what it is doing to me, it's closing me down, it's making me feel distant from you, it's not getting me to want to share as much as I want to share but we have got to deal with this. I mean, I don't need to say oh you are really, you know, that's really a very handsome set of headsets that you have got on and oh by the way I don't have to do that nonsense.

DJ: And just maybe the last, sorry...

DB: And let me, if I may, there is a final cost to the feedback sandwich and that is it delegitimizes positive feedback. Often people don't know the full impact of what they do well and we don't do a good job of that either. We say to somebody, nice job. Well, that's useless, it makes the other person feel warm and fuzzy but what was nice about that job. Again, you have to be behavioral specific. It is much more helpful to say, Deepak, the way you handled that meeting was really good, I really liked it because you answered the questions in very succinct forms. You spoke to the other person's concerns, you were well organizing your presentation, whatever it is. If it is behaviorally specific, you are going to learn something. And what would it be like if we had organizations where members were committed to each other and when they saw the other person doing something well, without using as a feedback sandwich we go in and say, you know, I want to tell you something, you really did that well and I want to tell you what you did well. Everybody would learn more and we would have stronger relationships.

DJ: **And staying with feedback, you know, when it comes to developmental feedback, David, when you have to share that with your colleagues, especially if you are somebody at a position of power and you are talking to one of your subordinates, what have you learnt about doing it well?**

DB: Okay, I am also going to want to talk about with your boss, which you can do, but let's stick with your direct report. First of all, if you are known as a leader who is concerned with the development of your direct reports, you are going to be a very desired leader. And we say at Stanford in this course, we steal the hallmark card slogan, we say, I care enough to say the very worst. I think good leaders look for ways they can help develop their direct reports to make them better, which may be to point out what they do well. They may not be fully aware of it but also where they limit themselves. So, I think, that if you as a leader are committed to developing your people as much as they are willing to be developed, the organization benefits, the direct report benefits and you benefit. Now, I think you could also do this with your boss. One of the things to realize with this three-person, three reality model is that you hold crucial information about the other person that they need. Others don't know the impact of their behavior. You know what your boss does that's useful, that's helpful and what your boss does that is not so useful and not so helpful. Now, the question is you have got to be pretty careful about sharing that. But I don't think you have to beat around the bush much. What I do and bosses walk around very frequently complaining. They say, I don't know why people don't speak up, I don't know why people are sitting their hands in the meeting, I don't know why people cannot raise issues with me. And what they are saying is, I am in the dark. I don't know what's going on. Couldn't you say okay boss, that sounds upsetting, I don't know why people are doing that, but I have got a hunch but would you like to hear? Now, your boss may say, hell, no and you just go quiet, but the boss might say what do you think? And then you can say, well, one of the reasons I think people are careful in meetings and it is why I am careful is it there are times in which you appear to be mad at people. It happened yesterday in the meeting when Simone raised this point, and this is what you said to him. And I saw him go quiet and I think I would have gone quiet too. Your boss is like I say, well, I think he was wrong. Yeah, that's good, we need to know, we do things wrong, but I think it is the way you do it that is causing the problem you are worried about. Can we talk about ways you could raise it. Now, you are on the boss' side and not only that you are the one direct report who is honest with your boss. As bosses walk around wondering what's being kept from them and you are saying, I am not going to keep things from you.

DJ: **Fascinating.**

DB: Now that's risky and it takes courage. But I don't think in today's world you get very far by playing it safe.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Thank you for listening. For more, please visit playtopotential.com.

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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