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## Context to the nugget conversation

David speaks about how it is important to signal the right kind of vulnerability when we work with others. He makes the distinction between vulnerability that could get people to question our competence versus vulnerability that shows others that we are human.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Moving to an adjacent theme David, a few days back I was in conversation with Jeffrey Pfeffer at Stanford who talks about power. One of the segments we spoke about was warmth and competence, how leaders need to strike a balance in the way they signal warmth and competence in different settings. And some of the stuff he says is, you need to come across as competent first for you to really have the influence and then for you to be able to get things done and I got a sense he talks about the notion of vulnerability being often counterproductive if you are solving for power. Do you see a difference of opinion in the way you look at the subject versus him or is it, is it just that you are saying the same thing but from different lenses?

David Bradford (DB): I think we are somewhat different but we... I would nuance it different. There are two types of vulnerability. One vulnerability raises questions about my core competence. So, when I taught the leadership class at Stanford, I said, if in the first day of class, I said, I actually don't know anything about leadership, but I was assigned this course, I would be crushed as I rushed out of the room as they should. That's vulnerability which raises questions about my competence. There's also vulnerability about me as a human. I remember the time in which I was teaching that class and my son was quite ill and I went to class and I said I am really going to try and be present but I have to tell you my son is ill and I am feeling distracted but I am really going to try to be here. That raised all sorts of support, caring and so on, I was showing my human side, by the way my saying that allowed me to be even more present but that's a side effect. So, I think what we are talking about is when we talk about vulnerability what are we vulnerable about? The other thing is there is a difference between competence in having the answer and competence in finding the answer. And I think leaders who pretend they have the answer to everything lose credibility because it is too transparent. But I think the leader who says, we are going to be able to solve this even though I don't have the answer now but I have every confidence that we could solve this is both more honest and more trust building. So, when I go in as a consultant, I am frequently asked by the client executive have you faced this problem before. I am not going to say well, I don't know anything about it. What I am likely to say is I have solved things that are similar and I am sure we can figure this out because what the client wants to know is that it is going to be solved. And my trying to say oh, I have the answer right away is false and they will see through it. And I don't think Jeff makes those distinctions.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is such a simple distinction that David makes here. I remember very early on in my coaching journey, I facilitated an offsite with a leadership team with several high calibre, type A kind of individuals. Right off the bat, I remember telling the team that I had never done this kind of work before and I was doing it based on first principles. The next two days were so-so and I still reflect on that piece of work with mixed emotions. I remember in the subsequent feedback session with the CEO, she mentioned that while what I did was generally on point, I didn't have to undersell myself by stating that I haven't done this kind of work before. By doing that, she went on to say that despite my doing good work, the team probably discounted a lot of it because of its perception of my competence. Something that has stayed with me. I like how David distinguishes between two kinds of vulnerability – one that questions the competence, the other kind where people get to know you are human!

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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