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Context to the nugget conversation

Jeffrey speaks about how, when people become more powerful, they stop getting meaningful feedback given the power dynamic. He also speaks about how we all need to get out of our own way by reminding ourselves behind the “Why” behind accumulating greater Power.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): The one thing I notice Jeffrey in my coaching work is that as leaders gain more power, the quality of the signals, signals that give them feedback, often either signals die because people go quiet, because the asymmetry of power or there is a lot of noise in that signal because there is posturing. When you look at leaders who have been effective, do you have any thoughts around how leaders can build a meaningful feedback loop as they start accumulating more power?

Jeffrey Pfeffer (JP): Absolutely, and the most obvious answer to that question is to get feedback from people who do not depend upon the leaders' decisions. So, when Gary Loveman was running Caesars, he got a lot of feedback about how important he was or not from his spouse. Again, if you look at the Wall Street Journal and look at their little segment once or twice a week where they talk about building a personal board of directors, when you build a personal board of directors, those people are not people who work for you or who are clients of yours or pardon me, suppliers of yours who depend upon your beneficence for their well-being. So, I think you want to do the same thing that you would do as a company would do which is try to, you know, companies try, they do not always succeed, to get 'independent directors' to give them independent objective advice for the purpose of improving the company's performance, that is exactly the analogy I would draw here. You want to get a few people who know you, who maybe observe you in various situations to give you objective advice for the purpose of improving, of learning and telling you what they see and helping you improve. And that, by the way, I believe is what you do in your executive coaching work, is not it?

DJ: Hmm. Absolutely. Part of my job very often is just to create that layer of trust and decode things that people would otherwise be uncomfortable saying one on one. The little insight often is the stuff that is in the blind spot of the leader I am working with, and part of my job is to widen that blind spot and to shed light on it.

JP: Of course. So, you can answer the question because this is in fact the work that you do. It is the value that you add if you think about it.

DJ: Absolutely. I think that is a key component of, you know, one of the people I spoke to was a lady called, Tasha Eurich and she talks about internal and external self-awareness. So, a big part of my job is actually widening both, internal and external self-awareness. I was curious about the correlation between power and data and your experience around how that plays out but I hear you loud and clear. You also talk about our orientation towards power often depends on where we sit in the society, the pro-social approach versus being politically savvy and you say that where we are in social class often predicts our comfort with the two strategies above. Can you say more about this and implication for people who are trying to climb the ladder? If I may take my personal example, I come from what would be termed as the Indian middle class and it took me a while to really, the initial years were just spent on doing good work, but then subsequently, I realized that it is not just that that is of course necessary but not sufficient and there are these other elements you need to think about. So, can you talk a little bit about that piece of insight?

JP: Yeah, it goes back to rule one which is to get out of your own way. Many people are programmed to get in their own way by thinking that certain things are inappropriate, they are not supposed to network, they are not supposed to develop and project a strong personal brand, they are not supposed to act and speak with power, they are supposed to follow the rules and conform to things and whatever. And so, to get them out of their own way, one of the strategies that my colleague Peter Belmi came up with which works pretty well, is to convince people that they are not acting for their own interests but they are acting for the good of the collectivity. And so, they are much more willing to do what they need to do if they think they are doing it for other people, not just themselves.

DJ: Hmm. I guess the clarity around the why becomes that much more important.

JP: Yeah.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The more work I do in this space, the more I am convinced that one of the areas where I can add disproportionate value is in opening people's aperture around their self-awareness. The first three to four months in my journey with a leader are often around a series of journaling prompts, coupled with me speaking to 20-30 people around the leader and then pressure testing these with some psychometrics. I find that as we grow in our journeys, we stop getting nuanced feedback from the various people around us. Very often is because of the asymmetry between us and the people around us.

But going back to what Jeffrey says about Gary Loveman who was running Caesars getting feedback from his wife, I would say I have personally benefited from my wife showing me the mirror and keeping me grounded along the way. A similar insight came from my conversation with R Gopalakrishnan (RG) who is a seasoned Board Member and a former Senior Executive at HUL and Tata Sons. He speaks about the role that Clementine Churchill played in Winston Churchill's life.

RG: *"when I used to go to London I would often visit museums and so on, I went to the Imperial War Museum in the bunker room near St. James Park, Regent's Park and I found a letter there, framed and put up on the wall and when I peered at it closely, it was handwritten by his wife, Winston Churchill's wife Clementine to him and it read something like "My dear darling Winnie, you are a wonderful man, the nation needs you now, it's dated 1941 or 42. But the other day I heard people saying that you are now becoming irascible and impossible and they are not able to talk to you. My darling Winnie, you know, I love you so much; I would not want anything better for you or for this*

nation than success in the war. Why don't you mend your ways a bit, your... and it had all... it was a bit torn up and then put together again and the story behind it I learned later was that she wrote this letter, he came so tired that evening that she said no, no, I can't hurt him further, she tore it up. Next morning she said if I don't tell him who the hell is going to tell him and she put the letter together and that's what is saved and kept there and then of course I have got the actual words which I have mentioned and reproduced in the book. But this is what happens, I don't know how many times my wife has told me what a prick I was in a particular interaction. She says I don't understand what subject you were discussing, I am not interested in because that's not my field but the way you spoke to this guy was wrong and when I reflect on it very often even in a marriage the spouse tells the other person, I keep saying wife but it could be the other way around so I rather use the word spouse, it's not what you told me that I object to but how you told me. Show me a married person who hasn't been through that discussion. So how you do things matters a lot and this is where the Clementine Mirror came in. It is not that Winston Churchill was wrong, it is not that he took the wrong decision, it is not that... but the way he came to his right decision was wrong. Clementine Mirror is what optical mirror does to your face; it shows you how many pimples you have got on your face, especially if it is concave. A Clementine Mirror is nothing but a concave psychological mirror, who provides the mirror doesn't matter."

DJ: As leaders, I feel it is important to have those vital few people around us, whether it is a spouse, close friends, siblings or a Personal Board of Directors that can show the unvarnished concave mirror to u to use RG's words.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from R Gopalakrishnan that is referenced: [Clementine Mirror - the role of spouses](#).

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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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