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Context to the nugget conversation

Jeffrey speaks about how one needs to be careful about showing vulnerability while climbing the Corporate Ladder.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): The other theme you refer to in the book Jeffrey is you say that people in positions of higher state is when they self-disclose to weakness that reduce their status, and once again when I thought about this in the context of the commentary around vulnerability to build trust, I was trying to reconcile this insight with that piece of popular wisdom.

Jeffrey Pfeffer (JP): Well, the piece of popular wisdom is not based on the social science, and one thing that people confuse is showing vulnerability to your friends, showing vulnerability to your significant other, showing vulnerability to your children and showing vulnerability in the workplace. People have, and by the way to their detriment, have confused because a lot of them have gotten their butts fired, have confused the office or the workplace with their house, you know, with their life. There is a demarcation between work and the rest of life, many people wish there weren't, many people think it has gone away, many people have tried to act as if it has gone away and they found out that it has not. So, what you would do with respect to your close friends, to the people, you know, Keith Ferrazzi's first book was Never Eat Alone, his second book is Who's Got Your Back, but Who's Got Your Back is seldom your subordinates or maybe even your peers who of course are competitors. So yes, you need friends with whom you can be vulnerable, you need friends with whom you can share your most intimate secrets, but those are not necessarily the people in your workplace.

DJ: Hmm. And if we take this piece of insight and apply it, in the corporate world, there is a spectrum of cultures, would you say this needs to be contextually applied to a certain culture or would you say that regardless, it is helpful to keep some sort of a healthy separation because in some companies, for example if I take Satya Nadella of Microsoft, when he wrote the book Hit Refresh, he speaks about his family, his son who is differently abled and so on who passed away recently, so there was a little bit of commentary around being human talking about warts and all. So how do you think about that Jeffrey?

JP: When you become CEO of Microsoft, you can disclose anything you want. But I am not sure still you want to disclose that on the way up to that position. Again, people need to be really clear about where people are in their career, both in terms of ages, as you have already alluded to, but also in terms of their position. One of the things that power gives you is the ability to do things that other

people cannot do. So, until you are in that position of power, maybe you do not do some of the things that the people in power are doing.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I must confess, I am a little uncomfortable with Jeffrey's recommendation to avoid being vulnerable till you get to the very top. In this context, I like what David Bradford (DB) of Stanford says about the kind of vulnerability we show in different contexts.

DB: *"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?"*

DJ: Worth thinking about whether we are trying to be human or whether we are coming across as incompetent by being vulnerable. I think that distinction would be useful about how we think about vulnerability. Thank you for listening.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from David Bradford that is referenced: [Displaying the right kind of vulnerability](#).

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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 [98.06 Jeffrey Pfeffer - Vulnerability and Power](#)

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