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Context to the conversation

Carol and David speak about how we can adopt multiple approaches to a situation. They borrow from the notion of fight, flight, fright or befriend and talk about the different approaches' leaders could take to a situation – Lean in, lean back, don't lean at all and Lean with.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And moving from M to O, I like the phrase you use, where there is a will, there are at least four ways, and you go on to talk about the four different stances we could take in the way we engage with the situation, could you talk a little bit about the four stances, lean in, lean back, do not lean at all and lean with, and more specifically as I was processing it, I was trying to get the nuance between lean back and do not lean at all but would love to hear you unpack that?

David Noble (DN): So, let me just set that up and then Carol can talk about the four stances because that is one way of finding four ways to win and there are also many other ways to find four ways to win in the book, it is a really crucial thing. But the premise is that because volatility is on an escalating trajectory, we get nonlinear kind of curve balls and obstacles thrown at us all the time. So, what we find is that good leaders can identify one way to win but in many cases these days, you need a backup to that plan and you need a backup to the backup. So that is why we want to have way power which is multiple ways forward because the more viable options you have to achieve a goal, again the more likely you are to achieve the goal. And then, Carol can pick it up for those stances.

Carol Kauffman (CK): Right and there is a lot of research based on this, many studies have looked at it and looked at predicting success based on, do people have this way power. Where does this come from, it comes from the four main reflexes that we all have which are fight, flight, freeze and the friend. The friend is a new one in terms of people understanding it and that is, if you see a little kid in front of a bus coming on, you do not think whether or not you should save them, it is a reflex to just grab them. We have translated this into what we call the four stances. So, if you watch tennis for example or even play it, it is not like they do with the arms, it is how they set their legs, the stance they take before, it is a forehand, a different stance for a backhand or close to the net, etc. And that is basically what we think is what is your default stance that you can take and then, how can you expand it. And the four stances are in a nutshell, first, lean in, lean back, do not lean, or lean with. So lean in is rolling up your sleeves, really engaging, if there is a conflict, going there. Now, it does not mean you lean in in a directive way, it means you are actively engaged. It could be edgy, it could be enthusiastic with a lot of zest, it could be with the delicacy of a ballerina for the intensity of a rugby player. So, there is many ways and, in the book, we actually have a host of examples and directions that you can take. So that is lean in. Lean back is basically data driven; inquiry driven. I am going to

take a lean back, I am going to look at the topography, I am going to look at the data, I am going to be very rational in what I am thinking and in my choices. If I have to do a reduction in force, I am not going to be leaping in and doing that, I am going to really get out my spreadsheets and figure out what is right. Leaning with is leading with caring, concern, nurturance and if it is at scale, its culture, if you have a merger and acquisition, your integration, you are going to be thinking people first. So lean in is action first, lean back is data first, lean with is people first, and do not lean at all is reflection first. And the capacity to not lean, which is the toughest of all, requires a decision to be able to tolerate doing nothing for, it could be seconds, it could be moments, it could be a decision. So why does that one matter, one reason it matters is the other three are all kind of what your brain is producing, this one is making a reflective space. So, an idea can like hit you, it kind of opens up to kind of intuition or kind of new thoughts. A simple example is, let us say okay, so Deepak, you are giving a talk and it is important to you. And maybe it is even being filmed, and then somebody in the audience sneers at you and really, like you know, has that like, this is so stupid, I cannot believe we are wasting our time. Okay, so you can imagine the different stances. You would respond rather differently. So, if you are going to lean in, you might say, excuse me, what is going on, or okay, I am not going to look like a bully in front of everyone but I am going to talk to this person after the meeting. Okay. Leaning back, it may be like, okay, what is the data, what might the person be responding to, what are they thinking, what is the best way for me to interact in this moment, like, I am just going to go with the data. Now leaning with, I am like, oh no, what did I do, this person I have offended them, and I might like then, the whole rest of the talk be like, honing in on them and making them...like what I am doing but do not lean is, I am just not triggered, this person has sneered and it is nearly a non-event for me, I will just go on, I am reflecting and I do not have to react. So those are the four stances and one way you can think about them.

DN: I think that not leaning is the most difficult one as Carol said, and that is something because as leaders, we are all very action-oriented but when you think about it, it can manifest not just in allowing your intuition to come to the surface or to take a moment to calm yourself. But also, sometimes you can just wait and hopefully, your team is going to fill that void. You do not always have to act on everything and that team should be filling that space in many cases too rather than you doing it again. And then also, the example of letting the sneer go. Sometimes when there is something, you do not actually have to confront it, you do not have to deal with it, you can just turn aside and let it go right past you. So, it is actually a very powerful stance that is quite underused in the repertoire of most leaders.

DJ: Hmm. And you also go on to say that we all need to pick an approach that is consistent with our core self, can you expand on that in the sense the stance we take needs to be resonant with who we are? I found that quite intriguing. A part of me was wondering, as I was reading that to say, I guess the corollary to that also means that we also need to learn to flex to go beyond our default response but I was curious to get your sense on that connection.

DN: Let me step into that because if you look at the sequence, we first want you to understand what your default response would be because again, the whole theme of the book is know when your default is not going to serve you well. So, we want you to know, like if you are a lean in person, to know that that tends to be overuse. Then, of course we want and need you to be genuine as you step into the other stances, so what we do is equip you to be more agile across all those other stances. So, we actually show you how to step in more. So, if you are a person who finds it difficult to lean with to connect with people, we show you how to do that or if you find it difficult to lean in, we show you how to do that. So, all the way through, you are being authentic where you are growing as a person so that you can be more agile.

CK: Yeah. Just remember that the whole point is for a leader to find that space between stimulus and response. And this is one of the key things in this space. And because we have made it so simple, you know, who do I want to be, what do I want to do, how do I want to come across, do I want to lean in, back, with, not lean, we are making it, so it can be super quick laser questions to ask yourself and possible micro behaviors. So, on one hand, it is very important to know what your default is and to who is your default when that is appropriate but also to tweak your default. So, one of the things we do in the book is, we have three chapter based on the options generator. The first one is just about, it is more of a business chapter and it goes beyond that how you can make more options, more business decisions. Then the second one is, how do you use that material in terms of your own development, how quickly or intensely you take it on, etc. The third one is, how do you lean in, back or whatever, and it actually has a series of sections on each one to talk about you can lean in, well how can you lean in with your strengths, how can you lean in with your values. So, there is lots and lots of nuances, you can do totally deep dive, and at the same time, you can do it in seconds.

DJ: Got it. And one of the examples that struck me which got me curious David and Carol, you say that female Olympic athletes, with high willpower and way power, did much better than most of the contemporaries. I used to train for half marathons a few years back but it was interesting to see this applied even in an endurance sport where you would think it is all about the physicality and the willpower but I am curious how way power finds this application on that context.

CK: Yeah, so there is a number of questions that, there is a very simple questionnaire on way power. And basically, people who said things like, when something goes wrong, I have a back-up plan or I have two backup plans. So, if I am approaching something, I can think of four different ways to do it. And what it is, it is almost like that person will be more resilient and agile. And also, it is like they are not assuming that the first thing they do is going to be successful. I mean, think of entrepreneurs, I mean think of, like Edison and the lightbulb, what was it, the 5,000th try did it, so that is what it is. But the studies go from, studies with toddlers to grandparents, to athletes, to CEOs, these findings are very robust and people can Google an article called Rainbows of the Mind and that will have a lot of references.

DN: There is a very practical example which might bring it home which is, imagine that you are one side of a chasm and there is a 2,000-foot drop or 1,000-meter drop between you and the other side and the other side is actually not that far away. Now if you only have one way to get across there, you are probably going to be very reluctant to cross that chasm. So, the things that might help you are, if you look for options that are based on strengths or assets that you can resource. So, for example, you might be a good runner, so that might help you get some speed up and some lift, you might be a good jumper, that is great. You might be able to see assets on your side of the chasm that could build a bridge to the other side of the chasm, or you might be able to connect with people across that chasm who can help you get across it. So that is like four different ways to actually get across, so you are much more likely to attempt it, much more likely to succeed.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I love the way Carol and David expand on the point around expanding the choice set when it seems like there is only one option in front of us. Something similar came up in my conversation with Sir Andrew Likierman (AL) of London Business School who has researched the theme of Leadership Judgment for a long time.

AL: *“Well, very often leaders are faced with choices presented to them which are you can do this or this. Sometimes it’s you can do this or this or this and the indication is well the middle one is actually*

the one which we are steering you towards. Sometimes I give them one option. Now, in all these cases I think somebody who is running an organization has got to ask the question have I been given all the options and in particular, you know, for example, do I understand how risk plays out in these options? So simply being presented what I meant by not being boxed in is if you are presented with two options and you feel there are more options than you should be asking for more options not just simply accepting there are only two options because that's what has been presented to you. Sometimes it may be that you say we are not going to take any of these options because we haven't got certain important facts and we need to think again, go away and look at it again. So, there's another option which is do nothing at this stage. Now, I am not suggesting by the way that there should always be delay because in some cases delay is disastrous and there maybe... in that sense you may be boxed in because you can see that if you wait for another 10 minutes or a day or a week then matters will be outside your control, you will have taken a bad decision by taking no decision. But what I meant therefore is that leaders ought to make sure that when options come to them, they are careful that these are not the only options available."

DJ: Sharing a very personal example here. I remember driving up to a restaurant by one of the highways near Delhi. It was 4 in the afternoon and I was looking for a cup of coffee. I remember going up to the counter and asking the person for a cup. The person asked me which size I would like – Medium or Large? It was a crowded coffee shop and I was in a hurry to get on my way. I was about to blurt out my preference but I hesitated and did a double take and asked them if they had a Small. To which the person gave me a sheepish smile and said Yes. This is such a frivolous example of just choosing from what is presented to you but to Andrew's point and to Carol and David's point, given the stakes are so high, pausing to generate multiple pathways to a situation can be so powerful! Thank you for listening.

End of transcription

Nugget from Sir Andrew Likierman that is referenced: [Question the solution set offered](#).

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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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