Context to the nugget

Ashley speaks about the notion of Time Poverty and how it is structural and psychological. She goes on to say that while have more time for leisure now than in 1950s, we still "feel" time poor. She speaks about the role of technology in exacerbating this further.

Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And congratulations on the recently launched book Time Smart. I would love to explore the book in this conversation Ashley, but maybe before we dive into the weeds, give us a sense of what you mean by time poverty? You talk about that a lot in the book and how did you end up researching time poverty?

Ashley Whillans (AW): Yeah. So, this concept of time poverty is the psychological experience of having too many things to do and not enough time in the day to do them. So, people who feel time poor often feel conflicted between all of the things they want to do in their home life and all of the things that they feel that they should do in their work life. And I became interested in this topic in part because I was seeing the powerful effects that not feeling like you have enough time or time poverty had on subjective well-being. So, I am a PhD in Social Psychology and my research during my dissertation focused on the topics of time, money and happiness. I worked in a research lab that had a whole program of research findings showing that when it comes to our discretionary income, how we spend our next $5 or $50; we are not always good at knowing what's going to make us happy. We forgo the opportunity to use our money in ways that can promote happiness. In my labs research people get a lot of happiness from spending money on others, but often fail to realize this happiness in advance. So, people even who make relatively large amounts of income do not give as much as they could or should and we show that this would improve happiness, not only for individuals but of course for society more broadly. And so, following from this line of research my collaborators and I started to ask well, for not always making good decisions about our discretionary money we must also not be making very good decisions with the way that we spend time on an everyday basis. And in fact, as it turns out, although wealth should produce greater time affluence, we see that people who are wealthiest actually report feeling the most time pressed in part because they are trying to do more with less in terms of their time. So, I became really interested in understanding this pervasive phenomenon I was observing in my data, over 80 percent of working Americans in the surveys I analysed reported feeling time poor, like they had too many things to do and not enough time in the day to do them. And these feelings of time poverty had stronger negative effects on happiness than being unemployed. I since replicated these findings in countries all over the world. So, I really became fascinated with this idea of time poverty because it affects all of us in society, not just those who are making a lot of money, but also those who are struggling to make ends meet and those in the middle-income bracket and it has powerful effects on our mood.

So, I wanted to try to understand how can we help empower individuals to take more control over their time and ultimately to live happier and more meaningful lives.

DJ: And you mentioned that 8 out of 10 people are likely to be time poor, you know, as I was thinking about this, I felt it's a bit like, when you are drunk right, sometimes you do not know you are drunk if you are drunk. How do you, how do we know if we belong to the 80 percent or the 20 percent? What questions should we ask ourselves to give a sense of how time poor we are?

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I should provide some context to where this question came from. In my work and in the podcast, I realize that with a few concepts such as Sleep, we are a poor judge of how we are doing. One of the earlier guests on the Podcast – Matthew Walker (MW) the author of 'While we Sleep' speaks about this –

MW: "*And unfortunately, what we find is that your subjective perception of how well you are doing with insufficient sleep is quite a measurable predictor of objectively how you actually are doing with insufficient sleep. Translated it actually just means that you don't know you are sleep-deprived when you are sleep deprived and the analogy would be a drunk driver at a bar. Maybe they've had five or six drinks and they stand up and they pick up their car keys and they say look I'm fine to drive home. And your response is no, I know that you think subjectively that you are fine to drive home but trust me objectively you are not, you are impaired and unfortunately that's the same way with a lack of sleep*"

DJ: The same applies to the notion of Self-awareness. People's claims around their self-awareness and the actual levels of self-awareness, you might actually find a poor correlation. You get the broad drift. Let's now get back to Ashley Whillans.

AW: Yeah, so, this is a really important point. So, 80 percent of employed adults, so it's not of society in general, and I think that's important because I am also doing research on retirement and on underemployment and those are sort of unique populations. So, when we are talking about time poverty in this 80 percent number in the U.S. it's really among those who are full-time employed workers in the U.S. So, I just want to be very clear on the population that I am defining in this context of this conversation. Now, we ask in our surveys really simple questions to diagnose if you will have time poverty, which is exactly how I defined it. Do you feel overwhelmed by the demands of work and life? Do you often feel like you do not have enough time in a day? Do you feel stressed? Do you feel like you can't do all of the things you want to do or have to do? These kinds of simple questions on whether or not you feel like you have enough time, whether you feel overwhelmed are pretty good indicators in our large survey data of whether or not you are someone who is going to say that they are time poor and experience the negative effects. Again, time poverty is both structural and psychological but we really see that it's less about the objective amount of time that you have available either at work or in you're outside of work life, but it's really about how much control you feel like you have over your time that really matters for happiness. So, the objective amount of time you work or the objective amount of leisure that you have available to you does not predict happiness to the same extent as these feelings of time poverty, the psychological experience of not having enough time to do everything you want to do in life.

DJ: Right, because in the book you actually say that if we just look at the data, we actually have much more time for leisure today than in the 1950s. But if you look at the time trend, we are still more

time poor if we compare ourselves to 1950s. Why is it that it's psychological and not objective? Could you elaborate on this?

AW: Yeah, so, I think for some people in society and we will delve into this later, it is structural. So, there are definitely structural issues at play in our workplace and in our society that make us focus on work that waste our time during the workday, that make us commute long hours from our places of employment to our home. And so, there are structural societal factors that we can delve into in more detail that make us feel time poor. But in my models these feelings of time poverty or psychological experience of feeling time poor matters more above and beyond these other kinds of factors like how much you commute or how much money you make, which feed into time poverty but are not necessarily as important for happiness as the psychological experience. And one thing that I talk about a lot is the idea that our technology makes us feel time poor as should become evident from the definitions that we have been talking about what does time poverty mean, how do you identify it? What becomes clear is time poverty is about this feeling of goal conflict. You are doing one thing and you wish you were doing something else. You do a little bit of one activity and you wish you had time to do even more of it. And technology is one of the leading culprits of this goal conflict. So, even though we have more discretionary time available to us, we feel like we have less of it in part because our technology disrupts our leisure into what Brigid Schulte and others call time confetti, small meaningless blocks of time that easily are squandered and lost. So, that one hour you might have had with your family after dinner is now distracted. Every five minutes, you will get a ping on your phone, maybe you will check some of those emails and most importantly even if you don't check those emails, all of a sudden your mind is transported out of the present moment and into an alternative reality and for most of us into a to-do list a reminder of the things we could or should be doing instead of spending that quality time with our family or friends. So, this constant tension between work and family is really exasperated, really heightened by our technology. Even when we don't check our alerts the mere presence of our phone knowing that we are getting emails from work pulls us out of the present and reminds us of our never-ending to-do list and creates that feeling of stress and time poverty that undermines our happiness.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I was talking to one of India's leading PE investors. He once told me a story of how he had participated in a raffle and ended up getting some time with Warren Buffet. He asked him the question – what is the one piece of advice you might have for people from your life. Apparently, Warren said "ensure your workplace is close to your home"; In essence, the best advice from one of the best multipliers of money was around how we manage our time, not around how we manage our money. I found that quite fascinating at multiple levels. I guess once we cross a certain threshold, how we manage our time becomes a greater determinant of our happiness than how we manage our money.

End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Matthew Walker that is referenced: [Deleterious impact of Devices on sleep](#).

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Ashley Whillans - Nuggets

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock 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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