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## Context to the nugget conversation

Dan speaks about how being diagnosed with Stage 4 Lymphoma brought him close to death and how that clarified a lot of things for him. He speaks about a phenomenon called “transience aversion” in that context and speaks about how he moved forward with purpose coming out of that event.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Absolutely, Dan. If I talk about my journey, 2008, my father was diagnosed with late stage cancer when I was in the US and in a way, those six months, dealing with his terminal cancer in his case, he passed away in a few months, really changed a lot of things for me. Can you take us back to that moment when you got that diagnosis of stage 4 cancer and maybe walk us through that passage of play and how that changed things for you?

Dan Cable (DC): Yeah, you know what is so interesting is, it is probably really pretty ways to say this but the way it felt to me was death as an idea stopped being an idea and started being something that would affect me and that was profound. I almost cannot say how profound it was because it went from being like a concept that was going to happen to other people to something that might affect me in the next three to five months. And boy, that really changed the nature of the conversation in my brain. And I could say in a good way I never recovered from that and I never want to. You know, it is almost like, it became much more critical to align like what made me happy and what made me joyful and what felt purposeful, that became much more important to align that now. For example, one tiny example of this would be, I always knew I wanted to live outside the US but nobody in my family even had passport. You know, we were just like lower-middle-class, nobody even thought about leaving the country. And I knew I wanted to but just never did, and so pretty much. If we take it forward six months as soon as the doctor said all clear, I started trying to move to England. So it just kind of precipitated more purposeful living I would say.

DJ: Fascinating. And if I may take you back actually, Dan, one of the earlier guests of the podcast who was a gentleman called Bruce Feiler who studied transitions across thousands of people, and he uses a term Lifequakes to talk about how people encounter these situations and how we use that as an opportunity to make meaning, with the wisdom of hindsight, if you go back to your days of making meaning out of being diagnosed with stage 4 cancer and recovering from it, what is the advice you would give for people who deal with these Lifequakes, having lived through a similar experience, what is something that you have learnt with the benefit of hindsight?

DC: Right. Well, the first thing I would say, which is the most honest thing is, I think these topics are so idiosyncratic that anything that I would say would probably be taken with a grain of salt because I

just think that it can really come off as, I would say, disingenuous in a way to think that one person could give somebody else advice on this stuff. And here is another way of saying it, I, in my own life, have realized some post-traumatic growth, meaning I was fortunate enough through a lot of different reasons that when I came out of this thing, not dead, I was able to convert that suffering and that deep existential angst, somehow I was able to convert that into a more meaningful existence with much greater joy, blah blah blah. I am sure you have heard this story a hundred times, but maybe what we have not heard is the thousand times when people are not able to do that, where, for example, they end up suffering in a way physically where they just were not able to rebound and that has always gotten them down from then on, or maybe, it took away their faith in a religion, you know, it took away their faith that God would do this to them. So I would never want to act like, oh yeah, just do these three steps. So with that said, you know, I think what I can say is in my own sort of journey through it is, it just opened up the idea for me that it is not a dress rehearsal, it is going to death that is, it is going to happen pretty soon, you know, certainly I am more than halfway done, I am probably three quarters of the way done and it just sort of emphasizes that you do not have forever to ignore death. And in the book, I actually call that Transience Aversion. It is the idea that, as a society I think, and I will say in the US society more than others I believe, we are really afraid of talking about death, we are really afraid of bringing death to the forefront. We kind of act like it is a dirty topic, like defecating or like, you know, it is one of the things that everybody has to do but we do not say much about it because it makes us like the other animals. And we like to think we are very special animal I think. And I think that that is a bit of a curse. And for me, I will just speak for me, getting rid of that transience aversion and just acknowledging that I would not be here much longer was so liberating and it was so energizing. And for me, that was quite a discovery, you know, that was not something I was expecting.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: While Dan speaks about seeing death from close quarters, I saw it when my father grappled with Stage 4 cancer around 2008/2009. It gave me a sense of what the end game of life looks like and in a way got me started on the inner journey which was non-existent till that point in time. It helped me uncover my passion on the people side of things which took me from McKinsey to EgonZehnder and subsequently to the work I do now. I don't think it would have been possible without this event.

One of my earlier guests Bruce Feiler (BF), author of the book – Life is in the Transitions - speaks about this and says that you have to be careful that you don't start making sense of things too soon. He says, you need to make sense from scars, not wounds.

*BF: "Life is the story that you tell yourself. And what we are talking about fundamentally with lifequakes or life transitions or crises or upheavals or whatever names have been given to this over the centuries, it is fundamentally a breach in that story. And so, one way to think about this is that is that a kind of a lifequake is a disruptive event and that the life story is the healing event. Like that's the way that you make sense and make peace with the disruptive event. It is in effect an autobiographical occasion. And so, the point about stories are told from scars not wounds is when that life upheaval is at its rawest in effect when it is still an open wound you can't fully tell the story yet because you haven't gotten through it. That's somehow that the act of getting through it and piecing it together and determining what it means and sort of deciding a new direction of where you are going, that's the process that turns the wound into a scar that finally allows you to tell the story. It is why in the seven tools that I have in the book Life is in the Transitions, the last one is to unveil the new story because it is at the end of the process that you can finally piece together the various experiences and actually in effect add a new chapter to the story of your life that accommodates the loss of the loved one, the loss of income, the loss of a job, the loss of legs, the lack of beliefs that you*

*used to have, the new political position that you have taken, the new relationships that you have formed. That's the way to think about this is that a lifequake is an autobiographical occasion when we have to kind of re tell re think re-tell and then re-share the story of who we are".*

DJ: In a way, COVID has brought the notion of DEATH up close to all of us. It is not that improbable or remote any more. All of possibly have either encountered or know somebody who has been on the edge. I guess it is a great opportunity for us to live our life with intention and make structural choices as we move forward. One of my other guests, Tenzin Priyadarshi said quite succinctly, that COVID is like a Cosmic time out given by mother nature to all of us to stay in our respective spaces and get our act together. Not learning from this would be a criminal waste of an opportunity.

## End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Bruce Feiler that is referenced: [Make sense from scars \(not wounds\)](#).

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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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