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Context to the nugget conversation

David shares 6 markers of what he calls as “Exceptional Relationship”. 1) You can be more fully yourself and so can the other person. 2) Both of you are willing to be vulnerable 3) You trust that self-disclosures will not be used against you 4) You can be honest with each other 5) You deal with conflict productively 6) Both of you are committed to each other’s growth and development.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Diving into your book, David, your book talks about a special type of relationship that you call exceptional and you say there are six hallmarks to exceptional relationships. Can you sort of talk to us about what you mean by exceptional and the six hallmarks?

David Bradford (DB): Yes. First of all, let me say that relationships are in a continuum. We have some that are casual, we have some that are more, have deeper connection to them, we have some that are quite strong and we have those that are intimate, and at the upper end, we have those that we call exceptional. We say all relationships and certainly exceptional relationships have these six characteristics. The first one is to what extent could I be myself? Can I let you know David that that is relevant to our relationship. I don’t share everything with you but what do we need in order to build a connection? And also, can I not have to present an image, present something that I am not, which I think is very relevant to certainly to teachers who do a lot of image projection and to leaders as well who often walk around saying if I am to be a leader, I have to present something other than I am. And so, what we look at is to what extent can I let you know David in a relevant way. The second thing is, since we are talking about relationship, can I do things that help you be better known as you are and we all do things that shut down other people and can we be aware of that and not do that and can we encourage the other person’s also personal self-disclosure. Now, letting yourself be known each of us also means that we become vulnerable. We share some things that the other might not approve of. So, the third dimension is can I trust that what I share won’t be used against me. And that’s of course relevant in organizations because information gets passed around quickly in organizations and I don’t want to share something that is going to hurt my career or hurt my effectiveness. But also, it relates to this relationship. Am I going to say something where you will judge me negatively and may even reject me. The fourth dimension is can we be honest with each other? Honesty isn’t sharing everything but it is sharing what is most important for us to relate and to do work together. And can you have confidence that what I am telling you is what I really mean and what’s most important and you don’t have to read between the lines. Fifth, any relationship, and I have been married for 55 years, any relationship has glitches to it, has problems, has disagreements, has even conflict. That’s true to all relationships and can we in this relationship raise those, not only resolve them but resolve them in a way that might deepen the relationship. And finally, we say, we find that relationships have the quality of are we committed to each other’s

growth and development? If I see you doing things or hurting yourself, am I committed up to you that I will take the risk of saying that. Now, these six dimensions are also on a continuum, and you don't have to be at the very top to be exceptional but you have to be high up on all of them to start to approach those. And the nice thing is about these six is they can give you a clue as to which ones you may want to work on to deepen the present relationships you have.

DJ: And picking on one of the things that caught my attention as you said it David, you talk about resolving conflict in a way that deepens the relationship. Can you say more about what it takes to be able to resolve conflicts in a healthy way which strengthens the relationship?

DB: Yes, a lot depends on how the issue is raised. So, I want to go back to the whole thing of honesty, right, you are somebody who will say well, I am going to be brutally honest, I find they are usually more brutal than they are honest. And this gets into how we define feedback if you can get into if you like to but we find that if you stick with behavioral feedback and I raise issues because I see this not as you being a bad person but as just getting in the way of our working together, being friends together and it is a sign that something is a little wrong. So, the image we use is let's imagine you are driving to work and I know driving in India can be quite challenging having been there, but let's assume that the motor is fluttering a little bit and the steering is a little loose and the wheel seem to be thumping a bit, you don't say bad car, bad car, you say, hmm, something's wrong, I better get it worked on. And we have to have the same sort of orientation when there's a conflict. When there's a conflict, it is not that you are wrong or bad or I am but something is getting in the way and can we sit down jointly and try to figure this out so that leads us into problem solving not into blame or accusation.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I love David's point where he says that when people say they are going to be brutally honest, they are often more brutal than honest! So true at many levels.

Of the six markers he speaks about, I want to underscore Point 6 - Being committed to each other's growth and development. Its an interesting one and there is something to be said about being too committed and too eager in the other's growth and development especially when it comes to Couples. This nuance came up in my conversation with Jennifer Petriglieri (JP) of INSEAD who speaks about dual Career Couples and how the spouse can provide a secure base and help the husband or wife grow. But she goes on to say that if we are too eager and too pushy, it can be counter-productive.

JP: *"So the couples who do very well I found are those who flick their model of support from that to a model of support called a secure base. Now secure means three things first it means of course there is that level of comfort that level of support but layer on top of that are another two things. One is an if I can think if there is a loving kick away from a relationship so loving persuade say you know I'll be here to dust you off but you get out there and figure it out so if you aren't sure if you are having this existential questions the response is don't worry we will be fine. Its okay gets out there then and figure something else this push to explore a push away from the safety of the relationship away from the comfort zone and into that learning there are not risk zone. Now this a bit counterintuitive because in a relationship when our partner feeling a little bit uncertain and a little bit wobbly our natural instincts just like that with our children is to hold them close is to give them a cuddle you know metaphor and this is quite the opposite when we see our partner struggling with something feeling a little bit unsure instead of pulling them close we actually push them away and in a loving way and to its quite a different model of support but the third thing about a secure base is also a very*

arm's length support so it's not about interfering it's not about did you call that head hunter, did you read that book did you go to that networking event that really unhelpful so it's a real arm's length push away and what I found in couples was when they could both do this for each other when they could both provide the secure base that's when the magic happened because what happened was both partner could then go out and do the work the experimentation, exploration and reflection that all of us need to do to get to your transition and both felt very supported in that and both could get to the other side and I think you know when we fort started talking about the second transition I said this could be a time of incredible growth for people in their career is a relationship and this growth really stands from this secure base support at the root of our relationship."

DJ: Back to David's sixth point, I feel it is critical to commit to each other's development but I feel it is as critical to do it in a constructive way.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Jennifer Petriglieri that is referenced: [Securing the base for the other to explore](#).

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David Bradford - Nuggets

- 97.01 David Bradford - Markers of an "exceptional" relationship

- 97.02 David Bradford - Healthy feedback - not crossing the net
- 97.03 David Bradford - Idea to behavioural change
- 97.04 David Bradford - Building an emotional vocabulary
- 97.05 David Bradford - Deepening the trust in a relationship
- 97.06 David Bradford - Nuances in giving good feedback
- 97.07 David Bradford - Leaning into the messiness to move forward
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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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