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Context to the nugget conversation

Sally speaks about two phenomena which are often at play when it comes to feedback. She speaks about how women sometimes can take the developmental feedback to heart and start to question themselves in often unproductive ways. She also speaks about how men can often have double standards and for the same set of behaviours; they might have a different interpretation depending on the gender.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And let us dive into the specifics of the book, Sally. Very early on, you talk about how women often respond differently to 360 than men and one of the things I did while preparing for this conversation, Sally, was, I said, let me not get biased by the way I see the situation or the way I have digested the book. So I asked a few women leaders who are friends to opine on the questions I should ask you. And actually, I want to read out one of the questions I got from one of them. And she says, on 360, while women respond differently, do they also get judged differently. She says, I have seen instances where similar outcomes and character traits get called out differently versus men. For example, a demanding no-nonsense man boss is direct while a similar situation with a woman can get her labeled as insensitive, aggressive or even “bitchy.” And if indeed there is a different baseline, how do women comprehend and act on 360 in the light of that. So I would love to hear from you on how women should think about the 360.

Sally Helgesen (SH): Well, I think that the woman you interviewed makes a point that I have observed and witnessed for 30 years and that serious researchers, including McKinsey in their Women Matter series that they began, brilliant research in 2008 and Catalyst and other researchers have noticed that the same characteristics in men get described differently from women often. I do think it is changing, I have watched that change, but it is still nowhere near where the assessment is, it is similar. There are two things going on. On one hand, I think it is harder for women to get accuracy in their 360s because of some of the judgment that comes in on exactly what you said on being direct. You know, oh, she is too direct, what do you mean she is too direct, oh, I do not know, she is aggressive, she is brusque, she is this that or the other, whereas direct will be valued in a man. So I think there is some judgment there. But there is something else going on that I have witnessed. And this you would not find so much in the research, but I have seen it so many times and that is 360s, women can tend to take them more to heart and to use them as an occasion to feel bad about themselves when they get any kind of negative evaluation and to question themselves in a very thorough and not always terribly constructive ways. Whereas one of the things I have watched, and Marshall would bet me up on this because we have had many conversations about it, is it often especially with very successful man when they get evaluations that they do not agree with or do not like, they think that person got it wrong or they get angry about it or they say, you know, it is lousy

test or, you know, it was bad questions, whatever. So that is the other thing that I think that there is on one hand, differences often that are getting less pronounced but slowly in how evaluations are done, but there is also a difference in how much men and women often take the results to heart.

DJ: Hmm. And back to the earlier point you made, Sally, about some of these biases in the way the behaviors are noticed in men and women, any messages for the men out there in terms of ensuring objectivity, while delivering feedback to a woman specifically?

SH: I think it is very helpful for men to be aware of this and to be able to catch themselves and really ask themselves hard questions when they hear themselves say things like, I think she is a little too aggressive, I think she is a little bit too direct, and try to figure out what that would look like in a way that they would think was positive because usually, it is either you are too direct or I cannot figure out what they are actually saying she is so indirect, and they are not leaving much of a space between. So I think it is very helpful and I think this is one area we have made so much progress I have to say. As someone who has been in these 30 years, it has really changed. And I think men are much more, in my observation, open to saying, I am wondering if that might be an unconscious bias that I am bringing into play here when I have that objection and to stop and sort of question themselves with that quick evaluation, I see much more of that happening.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Thank you for reading. Sally makes an interesting point about men could pause and reconsider if they are falling victim to an unconscious bias in the way they are looking at the behaviour of a women.

In this context, a movie scene comes to mind. It is the final courtroom scene in the movie A time to Kill, based on the novel by John Grisham. Matthew McCaunnaghey plays a lawyer, Jake Brigance, who is defending a black father Carl Lee played by Samuel Jackson. The movie is set in Mississippi during the peak of Ku Klux Klan and Carl Lee's daughter is brutally raped by two white men. He knows that he has no hope of getting justice so ends up killing the perpetrators. Now Jake is defending Carl Lee and the jury is all white. The final courtroom scene is a classic scene where Jakecie asks the jury members to close their eyes and narrates the gory details of Carl Lee's daughter's rape and death. He finishes it by asking them to imagine if it was a white girl. I would strongly urge you to see this scene to understand what I am saying. To see this scene just go to YouTube and type A time to kill – final courtroom scene.

While this is an extreme situation, I find this as a great example of how we need to pause and reframe situations in our head to overcome the biases we might have especially when it comes to gender. The key question is how we build those pauses to ensure we are not falling victim to the biases that supersede us.

End of nugget transcription

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Sally Helgesen - Nuggets

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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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