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Context to the nugget conversation

Jeffrey speaks about how he came around to studying Power. He also goes on to speak about the kinds of career choices he has made and what he has said No to over time as his Power increased over time.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): One of the pieces I am curious about Jeffrey is how people make choices. If you reflect on the last 50 years and as your power is increased, as your expertise in the domain grew, what sorts of things have you said no to and what sort of choices have you made to continue to do what you love and what you enjoy?

Jeffrey Pfeffer (JP): You know, my late wife would tell you this, I have the only job from which I would not be fired because of course I have tenure. So, what I have mostly said no to is academic administration. I love being a professor, I love doing my research. I would not want to be an Associate Dean or a Dean or a Provost or Vice Provost or an Assistant to the Vice Provost or any of these other titles. And so, I did take one academic administrative job. I ran the executive education under Nobel Prize winner Mike Spence when he was the Dean. I did that for two years. I am immortalized and memorialized in the Stanford minutes as he said when he gave a report to the faculty senate that I had accomplished more change in a quicker period of time than anybody in the history of higher education. So, he was quite complimentary but I decided I did not like to do that. In the words of my colleague, the late James G. March, one of the founders of this field, you can have power or you can have autonomy, you cannot have both, and I chose autonomy.

DJ: Hmm. Can you expand on that Jeffrey, you cannot have power and autonomy, can you say more about what is the trade-off, not the trade-off, but what is the distinction there?

JP: Absolutely, think about Barack Obama or think about, you know, closer to home my dear friend Garth Saloner, his now deceased wife was dying of cancer and they gave him the fall-off with the expectation she would die, she did not, and now it is a winter. And he has a responsibility as the Dean to have meetings, to go on the road to raise money. I see my friends as they take on administrative roles, when I had the late Head of the Motion Picture Association of America, Jack Valenti come to my class, I never called Jack, I called Judy Dickie, his Assistant who managed his calendar. When I went to Gary Loveman when he was running Caesars, the enormous casino company to come to my class and he and I became very good friends over the years, I called Reggie Kirk his Assistant. Someone other than you control your schedule. When you assume a job and of course the other thing that happens with the position of high power is you have enormous amounts of visibility. You travel with security. I could tell you a funny story about Gary and his daughter, but I

will spare you that story because it takes a couple of minutes to tell. But you lose your privacy and you lose a lot of control over your life because you have to do things that you do not necessarily want to do, but that the organization requires of you. You have to be the face of the organization. I have had CEOs say to me, and this is going to surprise you at all, I am an introvert, but when I do an employee meeting or when I do a customer meeting, I do not care or it does not matter how I feel or what I would prefer to be doing at that moment. I have to show up for the employees or the customers or the shareholders or whatever it is, and you of course know this.

DJ: It is really interesting. If I may juxtapose this with the work of Bob Kegan at Harvard who talks about having a self-authoring phase of life as we cross a certain point. Strangely enough, that is when we have the maximum power, our power is probably also the highest as we get to the later stages of our life, so the tension between the two becomes stronger and stronger as we age, doesn't it?

JP: I guess I have always acted in the same way that I act now. I mean I have lived a life without regret. I am very happy for the choices I made. I am glad I never became a dean or an Associate Dean or a Provost or a University President or any of these jobs. I enjoy what I do. And what I tell people all the time not to be, well, not necessarily be so philosophical but we can be. Deepak if I gave you a billion dollars and said buy back last week, you could not. Time is the least fungible of all resources. Once it is gone, it is gone. And I do not care how much money you have or how cute you are or anything else, you cannot get it back. And so, I have tried to spend my time in ways that brought me joy, happiness, a sense of fulfillment.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I love what Jeffrey says about what he loved and what he explicitly said No to. When I look back at my journey, I tell people that I see myself as a surgeon and do not have any interest in building a hospital which is a very different pursuits, which requires very different skills and the leadership ask is very different for that. I would like to have good conversations with good people whether it is the Advisory work I do or the Podcast conversations. Building a firm requires a very different set of capabilities and motivations and am not sure if I have them and what really energises me. It was helpful to have Jeff talk about the trade off between power and autonomy in simple terms. Thank you for listening.

End of nugget transcription

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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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