

Episode 007: Recognition in Lean Management

Welcome to Lean Leadership for Ops Managers, the podcast for leaders in Ops Management who want to spark improvement, foster engagement, and boost problem solving - AND still get their day job done. Here's your host, Leadership Trainer, Lean Enthusiast, and Spy Thriller Junkie, Jamie V. Parker.

Jamie: Hello, Ops Managers. Today, I am excited for our first interview of the show. Eric Wood serves as the safety and maintenance manager at a manufacturing company where he leads a total team of 30, including both individual contributors and team leads.

Eric will share with us how he used to give recognition and what changed when he learned reinforcing feedback, steps he's taking to develop his leaders to more effectively recognize their teams and his biggest *aha* and advice for other operations leaders.

Well, I'd like to welcome Eric. So glad that you are here joining us on the podcast. We've been working together for, I guess, about nine months now, and I'm really excited to have you on and share your experience as an operations leader out in the field. So, super excited to have you here today.

Eric: Thank you, Jamie. It's a pleasure to be here.

Jamie: All right. Why don't we start off and have you just tell us a little bit more about your role and responsibilities?

Eric: I work as a safety and building facilities leader. What falls under my purview is a Plant 1, Plant 2 OSHA and C Compliance. Basically, in a nutshell, I oversee everything safety related for overall compliance in both facilities; general safety guidelines, offering safety documents, implementations as needed. I also oversee the maintenance crew, which consist of two industrial maintenance leaders.

Jamie: Yeah. So, you're kind of all over the place and really are leading everything from safety to maintenance to an actual operations department and group. And in doing that, you have some lead team members that work for you, as well as some individual contributors on your team, right?

Eric: Absolutely.

Jamie: All right. Awesome. Well, today we're talking about recognition and reinforcing feedback. Before you learned about reinforcing feedback, can you describe how you gave recognition, what that looked like for you before?

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Eric: So, you know, Jamie, and regrettably, you know, I'm going to regret saying this, especially in the podcast, but I thought I knew a lot and thought, I practiced some of the things. Because I've been involved in training and doing things similar to this line of training. I thought I had a pretty good understanding of it.

But there was a problem with that is that I realized after this training, I didn't follow through with it as much as I should have. I knew all the things to do, but for some reason, with everybody getting busy in their day-to-day duties, you just kind of forget the most simple thing.

And so to answer your question, I gave moderate to some feedback. But once again, in a production environment, your results driven, right? I mean, you've got to get things done in the day's time and everyone have their regiment and their schedule to stick to. So, sometimes we lose sight of giving that feedback.

So, regrettably, I didn't do it as much as I should have and it definitely did not come in the form of what your program has is kind of conditioned us and taught us to do as an effective method of positive reinforcement and feedback.

So, I just would say, "Thanks for all you do. We appreciate you." And that was kind of it. And after your program, it's like, "Well, it's certainly good to thank people."

But it has a much more powerful effect, whenever you are actually thanking them and letting them know exactly what they're being thanked for and why it's critical to the company, because that aligns the desired behavior or the outcome that you want with what you're trying to get accomplished while praising them. So, it just it just it blends everything so well.

So, to get back to the central question, I didn't; I didn't give them as much positive reinforcement as I should.

Jamie: Yeah. And I think that's a really common experience, both the frequency, where we don't do it as much as we should; that's very common. As well as the effectiveness. And you mentioned that you said, "Gosh, I used to just say, 'Hey, thanks. I appreciate all you do.'"

So, I don't think that it's anything to feel bad about, Eric. I think it's a very common experience. I've certainly been there myself, too.

So, thinking back to when you first learn this, you know, how did it go when you first started practicing?

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Eric: You know what's funny? I would like to tell you that I kind of stumbled a lot off of it, but I really kind of took to it pretty quickly. It's not like I mastered it right off the get go, but I felt pretty comfortable in the formats that you gave us, that you trained us to do and in tailoring that.

So, I didn't have a ton of issues right at the first of the gate, but I will tell you this; I've seen a lot of other people that's through this, they kind of struggled with the formatting of it. Because what you're trying to do is tie everything together and that can become kind of awkward and it doesn't come off as natural. That's kind of how it started.

But then once you get the fluidity of it, it builds from that and then you start to target and see those things and you start to recognize them. Because when we have a long list of goals or we're very busy all the time, you can very easily lose sight of that and forget to do the feedback the way that you're supposed to and realize that you're thanking them for a specific reason and that lets them know you're committed to their job and you know what they're doing and you're telling them why they're being appreciated and what's important to the company.

Where you really started to see the results is whenever we got into your section about positive reinforcement and reinforcing those behaviors and calling out the positive. So, that's one big part of it.

The other part of it is you have to make business personal. You've heard for the longest time in your life, "Well, it's not it's not personal. It's just business." Well, the problem with that is you have to make it personal to some degree, because if you don't, you don't get that connection that buy in.

Jamie: So, what do you think have been your biggest either lessons learned or *aha* moments as you've practiced this?

Eric: Well, I would say one of the biggest lessons learned is never, never, never underestimate how far a kind word and praise can go. I mean, you think about it. We all want to be told; it's human nature to seek out and want to be recognized for your accomplishments.

I had a quality control manager. He sends me an email today and he says, "Hey, Eric, do me a favor. Praise your housekeeping crew. Because I'm up here in the front offices and they're like NASCAR in here. They come in here. They're in and out like little Menges."

I immediately did not go to my crew and tell them that because I have a team lead that's over them. So, to teach him in this coaching moment, I said, "Greg, here's your opportunity right here. This is your positive reinforcement feedback moment. You can go and you can do this.

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And here's how you can do it. I want you to do this. If you've got any questions, I'm here to help you. But here's your opportunity.”

“So, I'm going to follow up and see how that goes. But tomorrow, whenever I come in, I'm going to get them all breakfast sandwiches. It's something very little. And, you know, you don't just give them the sandwiches and not say anything in the theme of staying consistent with positive reinforcement. You give them the reward and just tell them, ‘Hey, guys, I wanted to just take a minute and just get you these sandwiches and just take a minute to explain why this is important. Guys, before you all were here on this team, we always had complaints once, twice a week, if we were lucky, about housekeeping. Now that you guys are here, you're plugged in, dedicated to your job. You're constantly plugged in every day, making sure stuff gets done. That tells us you're committed to the cause here. And we greatly appreciate that. So, thank you so much. Enjoy your breakfast sandwiches.”

You know, something like that. It seems so little on the surface. It seems minuscule, but you have no idea the impact that that has on people. When they feel like they're appreciated, they want to come to work, they show up happier, it increases morale and boost productivity.

Jamie: Yeah. And you know what's so interesting about that is I think that food is often used as a reward. And I love this idea that you just said, which is, “Hey, when we do that, let's make sure we connect it.” And we don't just say, “Hey, great job” the way we used to. But, “Hey, great job. Thanks for all you do. Here's breakfast.” But instead, you know, apply that reinforcing feedback with the reward as well to make it a little bit more meaningful.

You learn the skill and you've been practicing it and now you're teaching and coaching your lead team members in your group to be able to develop the skill as well. And I'm really interested in hearing what you have to say about this.

So, as you're working with your leads to develop them, what have you learned that they need from you? Like what are they needing help with from you to help them develop?

Eric: They need a lot of help from my end, as far as getting the hang of the format to where it doesn't feel like it's scripted and it comes off as genuine. And I'm certainly glad to help them with that. I'll tell them. I'll say, “Guys, this is a journey. You're not going to get this in one or two weeks even. The key is just to practice it. And every time that opportunity comes up, don't be embarrassed. Don't try and mince your words around. Just speak from the heart and just realize that as servant leaders, it's imperative that we show up and we embody and encompass everything that is that of a servant leader, which is calling out the positives, looking for opportunities for improvement, helping people out.”

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And when they come to me, I will help them with the formatting and staying on top of them with a lot of your group exercises and homework that you've give them, just following up with them and saying, "Hey", not from an angle of, "Is your homework turned in?" but as, "Hey, how are things going? What do you need my help with?"

And they're usually pretty receptive and pretty open with me like, "Hey, I can't quite figure out how I need to say this." "Well, okay, let's do this. Let's look for an opportunity. Here's my idea. You tweak it how you want, but this is how I would say this. So, you can do whatever you want with it."

But I give them a lot of suggestions, instead of trying to come off as, "Well, here. I'm going to take this and solve all your problems."

Because how many managers have you seen in your time or leadership that wants to just solve that problem? They want you to solve it for them.

And that kind of is the whole core of this program, is that, hey, this whole thing and the system exists because once they get it right, they're going to be able to do that on their own, which is going to free up a lot of your time to push bigger initiatives that you don't have to be involved in.

So, anytime that they come to me, that's the major thing that I've seen so far with is they just need help, as far as getting the communication down or maybe understanding how to tie it back to, for example, we have the acronym REACH, which is Respect, Engagement, Achievement, Courage and Humility. So, we're tying it back to that, so they can draw that parallel and they can see how to show up as leaders.

So, it's still a process. They are early into it. But I think they're taking to it and I think they're bought into it, which is great and it's exciting to see.

Jamie: So, if you were talking to another Ops Manager right now and they're trying to develop their leaders to be able to do this, what advice or I guess, words of wisdom, would you have for them?

Eric: The advice that I would give to anyone that's on the operation side of it is that you've got to think outside the box. You cannot stay in a mentality that is we're just going to drive people and just drive them and drive them. That's how you get results; you just stay on them all day, you make sure you monitor everything. Jamie, that's not the right way to look at it.

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Because I'll tell you what that will do. That will get somebody to work just hard enough for you to meet a quota or to meet something. But when you need something extra out of them, that fifth year will be nowhere to be found.

But if you do it this way with your program, you empower them. You embody everything that you're wanting from a company standpoint, and you're there to service their needs. Well, then that is going to change the game with it. This is absolutely critical for you to have servant leadership and do things the way that your program teaches.

It's absolutely a must. You cannot be programmed into being a manager that is just there, that is a faceless leader or that someone who cannot connect on that personal level.

And it sounds like such a simple concept, right? If we look back to some of the previous bosses or people that we've had in our lives, I'm sure everyone could point out with great certainty and a list the poor ones that they had. They still probably see their face and remember them. And that's because they remember the way that they treated them.

People will forgive you for things that you do to them throughout life, but they'll never forget it. And you don't want to be one of those managers or leaders that people think about in that way. You want them to think of, like when they think of my name, I want them to think of Eric Wood. "That is Eric Wood. He's here for us. He keeps us safe. He's here whenever I need him to talk to. And he's just he's a good person."

I would rather them look at me that way than, "Well, that is Eric Wood. Yeah, he reduced the safety moderate from 1.36 all the way down to 0.87, but he broke everybody's spirits in the process." That's not what leadership is, Jamie.

And so, my advice to anybody that thinks they may have that issue in their facility, I'd recommend your program to them because you've obviously gained huge results for us in a minimal amount of time with some difficult personalities. And if it can work here, it's going to work for them everywhere. They need to give you a call.

Jamie: Oh, well, I appreciate the plug that was not planned and not paying him any money.

Eric: Yeah, that's absolutely true, ladies and gentlemen. If you're viewing, I'm not receiving any compensation or any money for this.

Whatever you're trying to create, whether it's a safety culture or you're trying to create a caring culture, you have to start somewhere. And a lot of people, I think, they don't develop that culture

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because they don't know where to start. But I'm telling you, positive reinforcement is absolutely critical, team building exercises, a lot of the things that your program has done for us or whatever, I mean, it's an excellent starting point for any company.

And the good thing about that is that it's not just a one tier; this translates from the top down. It doesn't matter what position you serve in. If you're a servant leader from the top down, then your organization is going to create that culture. So, it's just it's exciting.

And I'll speak for myself; I'm sure everybody else feels the same way because I've heard nothing but good things. But it's been a pleasure working with you on this. And it didn't feel like it was an assignment or something else that we had to do.

And I know that it's worked because we're busier than we've been probably since I've been here. We're running a lot of overtime, Jamie. We're running six days a week, but it doesn't feel as hard or as much of a burden. And that's because of that culture that's starting to be created here and that climate. And that does things for morale and productivity. And that's my final thoughts and conclusions on it.

Jamie: All right. Well, thank you so much for sharing. I think that here's this podcast, Lean Leadership for Ops Managers. And so, I do think it's super important that we actually talk to folks in the field with real responsibilities. But it's not just consultants or academics or authors.

So, you're our first guest and I really appreciate you sharing here today.

Eric: Hey, that is no problem. I appreciate you having me, Jamie. Thank you so much.

Jamie: I love Eric's energy and passion and commitment. Now, when you think about all of the things we could or should do to become better leaders, there is a lot to choose from.

In my experience, reinforcing feedback is a tremendous next step. You see, it's simple. It's easy to learn and it's easy to apply. And it has a quick and noticeable impact when you stick with it. So, from an effort versus impact standpoint, the ROI is pretty high.

It's also a great place to start because it builds a foundation of authentic appreciation that strengthens the relationship and makes it easier when we start tackling the harder things like change and correcting feedback.

So, here's what today's episode and all of the conversations we've had with Eric today mean for you. I want you to ask yourself if you're ready to give it a shot. And if so, go back to Episode 5

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and relisten to it. You want to go back and revisit the four-part formula for reinforcing feedback and start incorporating it into your day. Talk with you next week.

You've been listening to Lean Leadership for Ops Managers with me, your host, Jamie V. Parker. If you're interested in developing your team to effectively recognize contributions through reinforcing feedback, I have virtual and on-site programs that can be customized to your needs, and you'll start to see results in just three weeks.

You can email me at jamie@processplusresults.com or click on the "Schedule a Call" button at my website, www.ProcessPlusResults.com