

Assessing Lean Culture through Leadership Activities with Patrick Adams | 024

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: When it comes to a continuous improvement culture, how do you assess where your organization is today and what to prioritize? That's exactly what we're talking about today with our guest, Patrick Adams.

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Hey, Ops Leaders Jamie Parker here. So excited to bring to you today. Our guest, Patrick Adams, who is author of the recently released book, *Avoiding the Continuous Appearance Trap*. And I think you're really going to love this conversation and the book because he outlines some questions you can ask and some steps you can take to assess where your organization is today and figure out how to prioritize. And we're going to talk about that a little bit globally and then also dig into one specific area in much more detail and talk a little bit about next steps; what can you actually do? So, let's dive in.

So, I want to welcome to the show, Patrick Adams. Patrick, it's so good to have you today.

Patrick: Hey, it's great to be here, Jamie. Thanks for having me.

Jamie: Well, I am excited to chat with you today because you recently published a book, which is exciting.

Patrick: Yes, I did.

Jamie: Congratulations.

Patrick: It is exciting. My first book. And so, I'm excited to have it out. A lot of work, but it's good to finally have it out there and it's getting in the hands of the people that need it most. So, it's exciting.

Jamie: All right. We're going to talk about that today. I want to hear a lot about it. But before we do that, can you just provide a little bit of an introduction of kind of what made you fall in love with Lean?

Patrick: Sure. Yeah, absolutely.

So, I spent about eight years in the military. When I got out of the military, I landed a job as a production supervisor at a plastics plant in West Michigan. And I just completely fell in love with manufacturing. And it wasn't too much longer after that when I was introduced to Lean and continuous improvement.

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And just again, obviously understanding enough about manufacturing and then having this this amazing methodology land in my lap, I'm like, "Why does everybody not know about this? Why is everybody not doing this?"

And, you know, I was fortunate enough to land at a few companies that had adopted Lean, and were deploying it properly, and I was connected with some really great coaches and just really, again, just fell in love with the idea of improving over time, incrementally, continuously, and just really enjoyed everything about it.

Parker Hannifin was it was a huge contributor in my development as a Lean practitioner. They have an amazing program from executive leadership all the way down, through the organization, embedded in the organization. And so I was able to work with some, like I said, some really great coaches and just really adopted it into my own personal lifestyle, as well as how I do work every day.

Jamie: Yeah. I love hearing this kind of story of falling in love with manufacturing and then falling in love with Lean and going, "Oh, my goodness, why do we all do this."

Patrick: Exactly.

Jamie: It will be very fun and so relevant for the audience here today, which typically, those Ops Managers who are practicing Lean and, you know, you really have some of that relevant experience of understanding what it's like to be in the trenches.

Patrick: That's right. And I've worked, both as a Lean practitioner, as a Lean manager, as well as an Ops Manager, production supervisor, a plant manager. So, I've been able to experience, you know, different aspects of operations.

That's one of the things I think that sets me a little bit apart from a lot of consultants out there, is that I have been in the trenches and I understand a lot of the struggles and the challenges that come with being an Ops Manager or being in operations.

It's not as simple sometimes as it seems to be when you're reading it in a book. All of a sudden, you have all these other things hitting you from one side and then someone else pulling you in another direction and fire is popping up everywhere.

And so, being able to navigate that and be in that role has really helped me to understand when someone says, "This is not easy for me." Being able to understand that and really feel for them, I think, is something that definitely has helped me over the years.

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Jamie: Yeah, I love it. I can guarantee you there are people that just heard that, and are like, “Yes, that’s me. You’re talking to me right now; all those different direction that things are flying at me.”

Very cool.

Well, let’s dive and tell me and tell our listeners about this book.

Patrick: Yeah. So, the title of the book is Avoiding the Continuous Appearance Trap. And its 12 questions to help the readers uncover what’s truly underneath their culture.

So, early in my career, I worked for two companies. And if you were to walk into both of these companies, at the surface level, they would look very similar. Both had visual management, similar KPI, safety quality, cost delivery. Both had similar org structures. There was value stream maps on the wall. There’s tape on the floor. So, very similar, if you were to look at these two companies, but very different approach to how they sustain those items that you would see throughout the organization. And one of those companies had an amazing culture of continuous improvement and the other one had, what I like to call, a culture of continuous appearance.

And the reason why I say that is because, again, at the surface level, they appeared to have everything together, but underneath was a very toxic culture where people hated to work, the turnover was high, there was no sustainability of the improvement of items. You hardly ever see leadership out on the floor with the team members. And there’s just a lot of challenges that you would see underneath all of that.

You know, if you got up really close to one of those really nice-looking value stream maps on the wall, you would notice that there’s either no date on it, because it was maybe three or four years ago, or there is a date on it and it’s outdated. And you’d see trash cans, maybe not in the taped or painted box on the floor, the majority of the time, but when there was executive leaders getting ready to walk through, all of a sudden, everything gets put back in its place where it’s supposed to be for the tour.

And so, those are the types of things that you would see in a company with a culture of continuous appearance versus a true culture of continuous improvement.

And so, really, the book uses those two companies as a case study. And I walk through each of the 12 questions with examples from both of those companies that help the reader to really understand why that question is so important as they begin to assess themselves and seeing where do they sit and what’s really underneath their culture.

And the idea behind the book is that the reader will take those 12 questions. And it’s not necessarily a step by step. It’s not this this road map for them to follow Question One, Question Two. But what it’s supposed to do is give the reader the ability to prioritize where they should start and give them some direction and then help them – It should really be the beginning of scientific thinking for the reader where

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they can start to experiment with some different ways of doing things that will help them to get on this road that's going to point them towards a culture of continuous improvement.

Jamie: Okay.

So, I love this idea that, "Hey, you know, through the book I've got, it sounds like, these 12 questions. In each question, I'll be able to kind of see an example of a continuous improvement culture, an example of more of that continuous appearance that is like at that surface level, but it's not their culturally and it's not sustained. And then be able to use that kind of comparison case study to really understand where my organization is; be able to kind of self-assess.

Patrick: That's right. That's exactly right.

And there's actually an assessment at the end of each question; a short assessment with a few questions to help answer some of the items that are laid out in the chapter. And then at the end of the book, there's a full assessment that can be filled out and actually help you to determine priority for where you should start.

Because every organization is at a different place in their journey. And every industry is different. Every team is different. When people are reading the book, it's going to be at different times.

Jamie: Yeah.

Patrick: So, the questions are meant to, again, to just give them some direction and help them to start experimenting with what the solutions are that are going to work for their organization and for their team at whatever time it is that they're going through the assessment.

Jamie: Yeah.

And I can really see this being kind of that structure for the dialogue. So, as a leadership team, for example, really being able to dive through that and having that structure.

Patrick: That's exactly right.

And also, it's 12 questions and there just happens to be 12 months in the year. So, if someone wanted to look at it in that way and think about, "Okay, how can we start experimenting with one of these questions each month and make it an annual plan of some sort?" I mean, that would be another way to approach it.

Jamie: All right. Fantastic.

Well, I want to understand more. So, this audience is, like I said, those Ops Managers; whether it's complaint managers or directors. When they're practicing Lean in their operations. Could you give us an

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example of one of those 12 questions that you think would be relevant for an organization, kind of evaluating, particularly in this operational space?

Patrick: Absolutely.

One of my favorite questions from the book is Question Two. And Question Two is; Where are your leaders spending their time?

And this is something that, again, for myself, even, when I'm writing – And I was writing this, I'm also assessing myself, and I'm thinking to myself, “What are the things that caused me to struggle in supporting a culture of continuous improvement?”

And then I'll be the first one to admit that I would find myself stuck in a conference room or in my office. And I would catch myself and think, “Where do I need to be right now? I need to be where the value-add work is happening. I can't answer questions from my desk. I can't try to complete this Eight D or this Ten-Step Problem Solving Approach to this A3. I can't do this from my desk. I need to be out there where the problem happened, where it originated, where the people are that have all of the information that I need.”

So, that second question is where your leaders are spending their time? And I think it's an important question for anyone that is in a leadership role. And I think that for me, it was a question that not only spoke to me, but in all of the different companies that I worked in, with different people that I've coached with, I always see this as a point that continues to come up.

And people you find themselves, because they get busy with leadership or management activities of, I guess, what traditional work environments would call those activities, and they're not doing the things that they should be doing. And I think that that's something that, as leaders, we have to really take inventory and ask ourselves.

Jamie: Yeah.

So, is there a process that you recommend for taking that inventory? Because I think sometimes it's obvious. Sometimes you're sitting in these, you know – I was talking with a client recently that was onboarding. He's like, “Well, I have thirty-four hours of meetings a week.” I'm like, “Woah, wait a minute.” So, sometimes it will just hit you. It smacks you. And it's really obvious.

I mean, there are also times, I think, that it's not quite as obvious. And where we think we are spending our time may not actually match reality. So, how would we go about taking that inventory?

Patrick: Yeah, good question.

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Have you heard the old saying, “Show me your calendar and I'll show you your priorities?”

Jamie: Yeah.

Patrick: Yeah.

So, this is kind of a funny thing, but one of the first things that that I asked my coaching clients to do is send me a screenshot of their calendar. And this might seem a little weird, but it really does help start a conversation about their priorities. As leaders, we must have our priorities straight. And that begins with where you're spending your time.

For example, outside of our work environments, if we say that family is important to us, well, if they're if they're that important, are you actually blocking time on your calendar? If you if you say that physical health is important to you, are you blocking time to get to the gym? Are those things that you've prioritized in your calendar?

And that's the same way as operations leaders, are we blocking time for the right activities that are going to establish the right priorities in our work; in what we should be doing, right?

Jamie: Yeah.

Patrick: And like I said, that begins with where you're spending your time. So, you have to ask yourself, if you were to assess yourself and the leaders that are working around you based on where they spend their time, would you say that you're spending time in the right place? And that's a question you have to ask yourself.

Many organizations have little in the way of documented best practices for where and how leaders are spending their time; supervisors, managers, directors, when they hired into a company or when they get promoted, they receive a job description and that's supposed to guide their daily activities. Well, that's not going to give me the right activities that are going to result in the type of culture that I want to create in the organization.

So, you really have to start by examining where you're currently spending your time. And I would suggest – And we have done this multiple times – but I would suggest that you actually track yourself for a few weeks and then allow the data to help you get a snapshot of where you're actually spending your time. Because I think you'd be surprised how much time you spend on email, how much time you spend in meetings, how much time you spend, whatever it is; fill in the blank. And if that's not adding value to the end customer, if that's not adding value to your team, then you really need to reassess.

Jamie: Yeah.

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And I think that can be really a helpful activity, too, for kind of the executive team that might be removed from the day-to-day, from the director or the plant manager, departmental supervisor; whatever your roles are. But they might be removed and not realize what that really looks like.

I've seen that happen where once that kind of time study, if you will, is done and we're documenting what we're doing, and it can be really eye opening for the executive to realize, "Wait a minute. There's something going on about how I'm setting direction, too."

Patrick: Yes, absolutely.

Jamie: Yeah.

Patrick: The way that your leaders behave and where they spend their time has a direct connection to the culture that the company has.

And then this is the scary part: Day in and day out, managers are tasked with engaging employees, but there's a Gallup study out there, I believe it's 15 or 51 percent of managers have essentially checked out; meaning they care very little, if at all, about their job or their company. And that's really scary, right?

Jamie: Yeah.

Patrick: And so, on top of all of this, where you have leaders that are – maybe that do care about what's going on, but they just, maybe they've been promoted into a leadership role because they were really good at running a piece of equipment or –

Jamie: Oh, that never happens, Patrick. What are you talking about?

Patrick: Right. Right.

But they've never been taught how to lead; they don't know what the daily activities are. So, you have that group and then you have this other group that's essentially checked out and they really don't care if they're doing the right activities. So, this is a serious issue for companies.

Jamie: Yeah.

Patrick: And one of the greatest barriers to establishing a culture of continuous improvement is that leaders avoid spending time where the value-creating work is being done.

Jamie: Yeah.

Patrick: And this is something – It has to change.

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Jamie: So, let me ask you this. So, let's say I've got, you know, we've got Ops Leaders who are listening, who are part of the group that says, "Hey, I want to do this right. Like, I want to spend my time in the right places, but I can't. You know, and I figured out; like I've done the inventory. I know that's not happening today. I can see where I'm getting sucked into firefighting or where I'm getting sucked into doing tasks because they have deadlines, but not because they're necessarily important in creating an opportunity for me to improve."

So, for those folks who just say, "You know what? I want to do this, but it feels a little out of reach; like I'm just in too much of a reactionary space." How can they start to make those shifts?

Patrick: Yeah, that's another great question. And there's not one perfect answer to that. In order to sustain a continuous improvement initiatives and a continuous improvement culture, we have to have a different leadership system. There has to be a different management system. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, expecting a different result. So, if you just continue to manage the same way; the same meetings, the same metrics, the same behaviors, you're going to get those same beliefs; the same result, the same culture that you've always had. So, unless you change the way that that you're managing, you're not going to get a different result.

So, one of the things that I suggested – And again, this isn't something that I've developed or created myself. This is something that's been used for years and years. But it's called Leader Standard Work. And I always suggest companies develop some leader standard work.

And in the book, I talk about leader standard work. For those that are maybe listening that don't know what that is. It's a very powerful tool that helps leaders to shift their priorities and their behavior to focus more on the process. Leader standard work as is process dependent, not person dependent. So, every leader in the organization really should have some form of leader standard work.

And the process is pretty simple for creating a leader standard work. But one of the things sometimes that's missed is involving the entire team in the process.

Jamie: Yes.

Patrick: So, I always suggest involve your entire team. This isn't something, again, that you create by yourself at your desk. You need to really talk to the whole team; those that are working in your work area. And then start by simply asking the team to describe the work process, highlight any critical activities, and then identify who's responsible for those critical activities; which names, which team leaders or supervisors are responsible for, what's the plant manager responsible for, what should be happening every day? What should be happening maybe every week or every month? Those are all important things to discuss. And then your leader standard work should come out of that.

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Jamie: Yeah.

Patrick: I guess that would be the beginning.

Jamie: I love it and I'm chuckling. One of these days, Patrick, I am going to have you back on. I'll tell you my whole story of the first time I ever tried to kind of do any sort of leader standard work. I read David Mann's book and I'm like, "Oh, we've got to do this."

And, running an organization where it was 18 plants, and we wanted consistency across the plants for some certain things. And oh, my goodness, it was the biggest flop of anything I've ever done.

And one of those big reasons is while there were some – Like we're just approaching it too much top-down and too much – While there were representatives, we didn't go through the real process. It was done as like, "Oh, this is what the outcome should be. So, let's try and figure out how to get this outcome." And we totally missed the process of developing; the process of engaging – figure it out.

Patrick: Not just that, but also being coached as leaders. Sometimes we forget that while we are supposed to be coaches, we also sometimes need coaches.

Jamie: Yeah.

Patrick: And especially when you're rolling out leader standard work with new daily activities or new weekly activities, establishing a new cadence for yourself, a good coach can help create the consistency that's necessary in order to make that happen. So, I think that's another.

Then that makes me think of Dr. Liker's Lean Leadership Development Model, where he talks about self-development as being one of the areas as leaders that we should be focused on. And then the second is coaching and developing others, which is really key to becoming a good leader. And again, one of those areas that companies don't think about when they promote someone into a position that's never had to coach someone, never had to develop someone, they have no idea how to do that. And they might need a coach themselves in order to learn all of that, right?

Jamie: Yeah, absolutely.

I think it's such a critical role, whether it's internal or external. And I know, I have my own coaches; I think you have your own coaches, too.

Patrick: Yes, absolutely.

Jamie: Yeah.

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Patrick: And again, yeah, it doesn't have to be an external coach. Someone internal that understands the importance of a daily cadence. And, again, when you're developing that leader standard work, if it includes Gemba walks, if it includes hour by hour board checks or whatever it is that your leader standard work includes, there's someone in your organization that probably does that really well and could be a good coach identified to help with that.

So, thinking about that, as you're rolling out leader standard work to your organization, you have to consider that; it's not a matter of just, "Hey, go Google leader standard work and create something and start doing it." There is a whole process for ensuring that it's going to be sustainable and that it's going to give you the benefits that you want to happen.

Jamie: Yeah. Okay. So, great.

So, here's an example of this question is, where are your leaders spending their time? And a couple of things we might want to do is to take this inventory, really understand where it is truly; like we can take a look at our calendar, we can take a look at our inventory, understand are we spending our time where we should or where we think is the best place from a value perspective?

And then leader standard work is one method that we could employ if we need to start making changes to actually change where it is we're spending our time.

Patrick: That's right. Absolutely.

One of the things that you mentioned, you asked about, you know, I think you referred to Fire-fighting or all of the different things that come around you. So, you know, for me to tell everybody that's listening, "Go deploy leader standard work", you're probably thinking to yourself, "Yeah, it's easy for you to say. You don't know what I deal with. You don't know what happens when I come into work and I have fifteen fires that are already being passed on to me from third shift or whatever it might be."

So, I'm not saying that this is going to happen overnight, but it is something that you need to consider and start slow, start small. Start with one thing a day that you say, "I'm going to do this every single day at this time" and then get really good at that. Eliminate all of the distractions that pull you away from doing that one activity and then just keep building on it from there.

The other thing is you don't have to be alone in this either, especially in a leadership position, you have people that are probably working for you that are experts in what they do. And tapping into their expertise is huge. There's a lot of leaders that feel like they're out on an island by themselves and have to make all the decisions themselves and take on all the accountability themselves.

This is another point that I talked about in the book is just really around shared accountability and engaging your team members. I once worked with a manager who spent the majority of his days in that

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reaction mode. He couldn't even walk around the production floor without getting pulled to help solve problems.

And at one point, I had to step in, obviously, with his permission, but someone literally ran up to us, as we were walking the floor, and started yelling about this machine being down and they're going to need shipments and yada, yada, yada. And so, obviously, again, with permission, I asked the operator one question.

And I think this is important for people that are listening that do feel like they're always in firefighter reaction mode. I asked one question. I said, "What do you think we should do?" to the operator "What do you think we should do?"

And he looked at me a little crazy, like kind of looked over at the manager, like almost like he needed permission to say what he thought. And once he felt comfortable to answer, he said, "Well, I think that this is very similar to another situation that we had in the past. And I think that probably the rails are just dirty and maybe we could just clean them and then keep going; like we might be able to keep running after that."

And so, I said, "Okay, why don't you go do that and then we'll check back in with you and see how that went." So, he went back to his machine and obviously started doing that.

The manager looked over at me and he said, "That's not going to work. I'm pretty sure that the rails are bent and we need to call maintenance." And I said, "That's okay, because when it doesn't work, that team member is going to try something else and they're going to try something, because now we've given them permission to figure it out", right?

Jamie: Yes.

Patrick: So, they're going to start experimenting and they're going to try some things and eventually they're going to find out that the rails bent. And while that might take a little bit longer this time, eventually they're going to continue doing this and they're going to start solving problems on their own and without having to come get you.

Because every time that you solve a problem for your team, you're enabling them to create these fires for you. They just know that if I have a problem and I go to this person, they're always going to come solve the problem for me.

And what needs to happen is you have to start sharing that accountability and sharing the decision making and engaging your team to start solving some of those problems. And that's where you're going to

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open up crazy amount of time for yourself, when you engage that that entire workforce in solving problems.

And so, that's just a –

Jamie: I'm over here like, “Preach, Magic. Let's go.”

Patrick: That's right.

And it's just one simple question. And again, it may not work in every scenario, but I just think I would challenge listeners to try that; try asking that question. And no matter how much you want to go solve it because you think you know the answer and you could solve it in five minutes, allow your team to take the time to work through that and just keep asking questions until they get to the solution. And let it be their solution. And then celebrate. Celebrate that they solved it. And it will change the way that you manage. And I think that's a good starting point for a lot of people out there that are in reaction mode.

Jamie: Yeah, I love it. Fantastic.

So, here we are; like I don't know how far we're into this. And we've got one question. You've got eleven more.

Patrick: Yes.

Jamie: So, I can see how, like I said, just really be that structure to allow for so much kind of reflection and assessment and conversation, dialogue across a team.

So, why don't you tell us, for those out there, like, “Hey, I got to get those other eleven questions. I got to get into this”, tell us more about where they can find that book.

Patrick: Absolutely. So, the paperback is available on Amazon. You can also go to avoidcontinuousappearance.com, and you can learn more about the book and purchase it from there. The e-book will be available on February 10th. But again, you can find it on Amazon. You can go right to our website, grab it from there. It'll direct you right to Amazon, too. So, I would say that's probably the best place to start.

You can search “Avoiding The Continuous Appearance Trap.” You can search, “Patrick Adams Continuous Appearance”, anything like that. And it should come right out.

Jamie: All right.

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And for those of you that go to our show notes, we'll make sure we link to that as well, so you can go directly in.

And Patrick, where can folks find more about you?

Patrick: LinkedIn is probably the best place. You can shoot me a message. I'm usually pretty quick to respond to messages on LinkedIn. You can also go to our website at findleansolutions.com, and you can email us there, too. But office@patrickadamsconsulting.com will get you to me as well from email.

Jamie: All right. Fantastic.

So, as we close out, just want to ask you, in kind of closing, either advice, recommendations or encouragement that you have for listeners.

Patrick: Yes.

So, I would say that just using a quote, one of my most favorite quotes, the most dangerous phrase in our language is that, "We've always done it this way."

So, I want to close by just saying don't fall into being content with the status quo. Always look for opportunities to improve. And that's also a little teaser for one of the other questions in the book as well.

Jamie: Oh, see? You better be running to Amazon right now. I'm picking this up.

Patrick: That's right.

Jamie: All right. Thank you so much, Patrick, for joining. Love the conversation. I feel like we could have gone on for hours, just on that one little topic. So, glad to have you here today.

Patrick: That was great to be here, Jamie. Thanks so much for having me. Love your podcast. Keep doing what you're doing. I so much appreciate it.

Jamie: What a great conversation. You know, Patrick's experience is quite interesting; with two organizations who had similar artifacts on the surface, but when you actually pull back the curtain, like peel back the layers, there are different cultures which also yields different results; different outcomes.

So, if you're interested in exploring this topic further, you can grab Patrick's book or connect with him on LinkedIn or find his website at our show notes. You just go to processplusresults.com/podcast and then find Episode 24.

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So, before I share your one next step, I just want to do a super-quick recap and talk about what's coming up next.

So, Patrick has this book *Avoiding the Continuous Appearance Trap*, and it has 12 questions you can use to assess. And he offered us one today, which is; where are your leaders spending their time?

So, we talked about making that assessment; reviewing calendars, taking an inventory. We talked about making changes. So, if you don't like the answer, how you can use leader standard work or how you can develop your people to be able to do more decision making and problem solving.

Now, here's the thing. This can be really a complicated topic, because what I hear the most is about how little time you have. Like, it just feels like, "I don't have any. I don't know what you're talking about. I'm always behind. There's so much to do. I want to get more of the right things done. I want to do all of this proactive stuff. I don't want to be in a reactive firefighting mode. Like I want to get into problem solving. I want to develop my people. But girl you're crazy; like I'm already working long hours."

And I want to get real about this topic and dive into this over the next several episodes, so that we can have a true, honest conversation about what can you do when it feels like you're just tapped out. Okay?

So, stay tuned, not just for next week, but the next several episodes. And if you haven't yet, be sure to subscribe, because you're going to want to get in on all of those.

All right, I'd like to leave you with one next step for the week. So, your one next step for this week is to answer the question; where do you, as a leader, spend your time? If you have leaders on your team, you can have them do it; where do they spend their time? You may even choose to have a peer listen to this episode as well and answer the question together.

And as you answer that question, use it as a catalyst to really think about and discuss, where should you spend your time, because you're probably going to find a variance.

Great conversation today. You can find all the additional links and information at our show notes, processplusresults.com/podcast and then Episode 24.

Until next time.