

## **Give Your Leaders “More” Time | 027**

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.

Hello, hello. We are in a series talking about how leaders in our organizations spend their time and how to improve this so that the actual matches kind of this desired state. And today, I want to talk to managers of leaders, leaders of leaders, COOs who are responsible for the operations leadership team, VPs and directors and plant managers that have operations managers on their team, department managers, and supervisors who have team leads on their team. Listen up, this is what we're going to talk about today.

Now, I've been talking to you as leaders, leaders out there who want to take ownership for getting more of the right things done, to be able to spend more time developing people, to spend more time and proactive, systematic improvement. Now, if you're responsible for other leaders, I want you to also look at your role in making things easier and better for them as they do this work.

Here's the thing. This problem, “I don't have enough time for the important things,” it's a pervasive problem. I see it pretty much everywhere I go. It's not unusual for the COO or VP to even say to me, “All right, hey, the managers are doing the wrong things. They're spending too much time firefighting. They're spending too much time in the weeds. They're spending too much time in their office or at their desk. I need them out on the floor, helping their teams get better.” And managers usually say something about the supervisors or leads on their teams too. The thing is, the COO, the VP, the manager, the leader of leaders, if you will, may oversimplify the problem as if it's a problem in the individual leaders, as that the individual leaders are making mistakes in their choices of how to spend their time. And while there may be some of that, it tends to be an oversimplification.

You see, when those team leads or supervisors or department leads map out how they're spending their time, and then we start digging into why, the senior leaders are sometimes shocked. Because what they learn is that some of those, “poor decisions”, if you will, are not so much poor decisions, as they are symptoms of the system and the culture, often which the senior leader plays a role in. So let's dig into a few areas - three specific areas - that senior managers should examine so that you can help the leaders on your team.

All right, let's start by talking about consequences. What are the consequences when managers don't do something, or they don't do it yet, or they do it late, or they decide, “Hey, I'm going to do that later”? And specifically, do those consequences match your priorities? So here's an example. I worked in an organization that tried to have a disciplined culture of accountability. And as a result, there were compliance reports for everything, like every task, every deliverable, every sign-off, every single thing. And those compliance reports would go out, and particularly for some of those compliance reports, you really didn't want to be on the bad list because then it was brutal. You'd have to stop everything that you were doing and get that done immediately to get off the list. And you probably had to either write an email

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or get on a call and explain the miss and it just became this big ordeal. So in this organization, in particular, they tended to use kind of the consequences, the avoidance of pain to try and drive behavior. People tried the “How do I avoid pain?”, and that tended to be kind of the primary method for behavior change.

So we could have a whole conversation about that, but we're going to kind of put that on the shelf and talk about in this situation for relevance for this episode is that not all of the compliance reports were treated with the same heavy-handedness of consequence. And so some of the compliance reports would come out, not a big deal, I didn't worry about it. Some I'd [be] like, “Oh, yeah. That's a reminder. I need to get that done. I'll put it on for the next two weeks.” And some of them it was fire drill, stop what you're doing immediately and get off the dang list. Now, here's what's interesting is that what made something that big ordeal, made it the higher consequence, it didn't seem to be based off of value. You see, what seemed to drive that was I'm going to call it the squeakiness, the squeakiness of maybe the person responsible for that deliverable or that area or the person or the group that supports that. So there was somebody who had responsibility for that report or that kind of outcome at a support level, so they weren't the managers in the field doing it, just kind of at the corporate office support space. And some of those would be what I would call squeakier in the sense of like, “I'm going to make a big deal out of it. And I'm going to send this extra reminder. And I'm going to copy the CEO and the COO in addition to just the VP, and I'm going to go run to the VP's office and say, ‘Hey, what's wrong with your people?’” And now, so this VP is sitting here going, “Ugh, how am I going to make a decision here?” And so now the decision is made, what drove the level of consequence was something that wasn't necessarily value-based. And so now in the field, managers were prioritizing tasks based off of this compliance reporting on low-value items, instead of high-value activity because they were trying to avoid consequences. So what a senior manager might call a poor decision of prioritization was driven by the systems of compliance reporting and consequences.

Now, the consequences in your organization or how it shows up might be different for you. Maybe it's not about compliance reports, maybe it's something else. This is an area I want you to look at. Have open, honest discussions with the leaders on your team. Try to better understand why they prioritize certain things. Try to understand their perspective of risk. What's at risk in making these choices of this versus that, or this today versus this next month? You might learn things that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. So get into an investigative stance and a research stance and a listening stance about consequences.

The second area that I want you to look at is decision ownership. Now, as a senior manager or executive, of course, you expect your team to make decisions. The question is, how do you respond if you think their decision making could be better? Does your reaction to the decision actually lead to indecision and waiting? So here's an example. I was working with an organization that had daily production planning meetings, and each of their mid-level managers met each morning to map out production priorities and staffing and who went into what lines and all of the things. The VP and the COO participated in those meetings as well. Now, I was on-site and I went to one of those meetings. The COO was in a strategic meeting that was running behind schedule and so he wasn't in the production planning meeting at the

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start of it. And so he wasn't there so therefore, the meeting hadn't started. And we were just sitting around, right, here it is, it's like five, six minutes past the start time and everybody is just kind of sitting around chatting. And so I asked the team if we wanted to go ahead and get started. And the reaction, the consistent reaction from the group was, “Well, when the COO gets here, we're probably going to have to change our plan anyways, so we might as well wait for him.”

Now, I know the context of that situation and I know that the COO was trying to teach the team better decision-making skills. He was trying to do skill development through these meetings. So I understand why he wanted to be involved, but we now have the situation that led to indecision. We had the waiting waste, we had second-guessing. And all of this leads to more challenges for leaders in getting more of the right things done. Now for you, this might show up differently than in this example. I want to call it out though, as an area to dig into as an executive or senior manager, and really try and understand where does decision ownership really lie? And what impact is created in how you respond to decisions you think could be better knowing that the answer might be different for different areas? Do you really understand where decision ownership really lies and what the impact is in how you respond?

The third area that I want you to explore is respect. How do we show respect for people when it comes to respecting their time? As an executive or senior leader, you have a tremendous ability to set the stage and establish the culture in your workgroup. Ever hear the phrase, “Culture is local”? We see this, we see the level of impact that the leader has in driving that culture for the organization or for their workgroup.

So here's an example. I worked with a client organization that really struggled with discipline and respect for people's time. And the COO would schedule meetings without looking at other's calendars to make sure they were available. And as a result, the manufacturing manager and procurement manager, and other managers on the team were constantly having to reschedule their own work. So for this example, I was working directly with the manufacturing manager on people leadership and people development. And so one of the things he was working on as part of that improvement was to integrate one-on-ones with all of the supervisors in manufacturing so that he could spend more time developing people. He was struggling, though, because he would schedule the one-on-one with the supervisor and then have to reschedule it because the COO would schedule a meeting with him at the same time. And to top it off, he didn't feel comfortable offering a different time to the COO. So he would put the COO's time over the manufacturing supervisor's time. Kind of have it backwards there.

Now, this same client organization was kind of sloppy when it came to meetings. They usually started late because we're tracking people down, “Hey, can you get on the radio and call so and so?” And they often, very often... not, I don't know if it's very often, but they often, at least - more than 50%, probably - ran late. So a meeting might be scheduled for 30 minutes or an hour, an hour and a half, whatever it is, based on what we're doing, but everyone kind of knew that it would probably go over. And so the hour block after that meeting was kept open. People were scared to schedule anything during that time. And so the challenge for managers was compounded because they couldn't count on their calendar. They didn't feel

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comfortable scheduling things with their teams and so they kind of resorted to just trying to do everything on the fly.

Now, you can see how the way time was treated was disrespectful, and how it compounded to make it more challenging for the managers to plan and operate from a proactive place. Essentially, the system and the culture and the leadership decisions here were actually forcing the team to work from a place of reaction.

Now, you may not have issues to this extreme. You're like, “Oh, no, that's not us.” “Man, I hear that. That's rough. That's not us, though.” Cool. I'm glad that's not you. You may still have issues, though, and so you need to look at this area. Do leaders reschedule time with their team to accommodate you as an executive or senior leader? Do leaders hesitate to schedule proactively? Why? What factors contribute to this? Understand this, get in, and really have an open conversation with your team.

Look, consequences, decision ownership, respect, these three things we talked about, these really come back to you and your priorities. As a senior leader and executive, what do you choose to prioritize? How does that show up in your decisions, in your words, in your actions? You see, the bulk of this series is focused on your own work and your own time and your own decisions. As a leader, how are you going to spend more time developing people? As a leader, how are you going to spend more time on proactive systematic improvement? But if you are a leader of leaders, you also need to look at this from the angle of how your decisions, your words, and your actions impact the leaders on your team. So what's your next step?

I want you to look at these three areas:

- Consequences
- Decision ownership
- Respect

Ask your leaders for their perspectives, ask them for their struggles. Ask them where there seems to be misalignment between what we say is important versus what actually is. Reflect on what you learn and decide what you want to do differently. And I want to encourage you, thank you for being open to looking at the mirror on this one. Thank you for being willing to recognize that you have a role to play in the challenge, in the problem, and then to own that part. Until next time.

If today's topic hit home for you, then know that this is part of a broader series designed to help you and your Operations Managers get more of the right things done. You can hear all the episodes in this series by heading over to [processplusresults.com/time](https://processplusresults.com/time), T-I-M-E, that's [processplusresults.com/time](https://processplusresults.com/time).