

## **Leader Standard Work Gone Wrong | 030**

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.

Hey, Ops Leaders, last week we had a fantastic conversation about Leader Standard work with Mike Wroblewski.

Today I'm going to share my first attempt at leader standard work and kind of talk about some of the mistakes I made and maybe what I've learned from Mike since then. All right. So, let's jump it.

So, I was in an organization that had 19 plants across the country. And in addition to having full operations responsibility for a third of those plants, I was also responsible for leadership development and continuous improvement across all 19 plants.

Now, the plants all made the same types of products, but it was made to order; with every order being a custom order. So, while the core processes and elements were the same, the specific details of how each order was put together could vary. And typically, customer lead times ranged from about 12 hours to 36 hours. So, that's your background.

Now, before I jump into our leader standard work attempt, let me first tell you that we made some pretty rough mistakes through the first years of our Lean journey. We had done top-down pushes and had like standards for standards sake, and we would learn a tool and then find a way to apply it, instead of focusing on solving problems; like all the things.

We're several years and our lean journey and we're trying to figure out how to move to a more consistent Lean practice in every day, and how to shift the culture of how we think and work, so it's not like too an event driven or too project driven.

Now, the plant management team had read David Mann's book, Creating a Lean Culture. And of course, one of the four elements in that book is Leader Standard Work. So, you know, like Mike said last week, we kind of decided that that's what we needed to do next. I mean, that's what the book says, right?

So, we put together a project team of plant managers and department managers, really essentially like the salaried managers, from several of the 19 plants to develop a leader standard work. And boy, did we go big. Like we had read all about the tiered structure. So, we built out activities for every leader leadership level in the plant; from team lead to supervisor to department manager to plant manager. That's four levels of leader standard work.

Now, keep in mind only two levels, of plant managers and department managers, were directly participating in the calls and the project team in the development. And since there were 45 plant managers and department managers, only a smaller section of 10 to 15 percent of those were actually participating.

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So, here's this project team participants that are kind of serving as this conduit to the nonparticipants, but you just couldn't get like 45 people together.

So, this is what we have. We have a project team representing 10 to 15 percent of two levels and really no one from the other two levels.

Now, we went with a checklist style, and I got to tell you, like we went back and forth on every single word or phrase. Like we we're like kind of coming up with, "Okay, what are the activities?" "What should they be checking?" "What are the processes they should be following up on?" "How do we want to word that?" "What's the question?" "Is that the right wording?" "Is that going to be interpreted differently" or "What does that mean?" "Well, couldn't it mean that instead?" Like really nit picking the language to get it to a point where we were happy with it or at least where maybe we had compromised on the specifics.

Now, we knew the whole point was to learn and improve from leader standard work, not just do the activities. So, we also built this whole leader standard work board; like visual board. And so it was on the spinner; this four sided spinner. And two sides had the daily meeting board stuff and then one side had all this leader standard work stuff.

And it had sections where they could track the information of like which questions or activities, did we fail to do most often? Meaning like it was on the list, but we didn't get to it. Our answer wasn't, "No, it's not correct" or "It's not accurate." Answers was like, "I didn't do it." So, which ones are we failing to do most often? And then the second kind of being which questions our activities, did we find failure points on most often?

And the idea was that like we could use that to raise awareness of problems and then work through the PDCA improvement cycles to improve. So, then we could kind of ask the follow up questions about, "Okay, so what's contributing to the problem?" All the things that you know.

I mean, here's the thing. The whole thing was a bust. Like we never got consistent execution of the checklists. And even where we got close on the checklist, the activity wasn't transferred consistently enough to the visual board, so that it could be used for learning and improvement purposes; like it was pulling teeth, it was dragging people along, it was push and push and push.

And not because people are like just being resisted because they're bad people. It's not like that. It's just that like we didn't have the discipline that was needed yet. We were still doing a little too much firefighting to be able to have that much of our day. Because I don't remember exactly how many things, but I want to say like 15, 17 things that they were checking on each day. I think it's a lot of time that's now structured. And we didn't have that much proactive time yet.

And we kind of went big. We were asking people to go from basically nothing to 17 things every day. I think that's crazy. You can't do that, right? I mean, that's like saying, "Hey, you know, January 1st comes and now I'm going to work out for three and a half hours every day." Like, no, you're not. What's our

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minimum viable amount? What's this small amount? What's the 15 minutes we can do every day or the 20 minutes? So, like, we were doomed to fail.

But essentially, after a few months of pushing, without getting traction, we decided to just say, "You know what? Let's take this 'program' and retire it or shelve it or pause it. And we can try again later." But clearly, this is not a situation where we can just iterate our way there because like we want big, massive, huge. So, we didn't do these small steps. We went big, massive, huge. We did all this planning work. I mean, this is all sounding familiar. You've all seen us done. So, we're doing all this planning work and then like, "Oh, Ben. It didn't work out well."

Look, it was crazy because like during development and even during the rollout, if you will – the rollout or the launch or the implementation – the project team was really proud of what we put together. Like we thought we were spot on. We thought we were doing exactly what we should be doing, based on what the book said.

And this is why I love the messages and takeaways Mike shared in last week's episode. If you missed it, you need to go check it out. He had really deep lessons and he just kind of casually share them. So, was easy to miss, if we didn't slow down and pay attention.

But here are just a few things. So, first of all, we were trying to do a program; "Here's our leader standard work program." And leader standard work is not a program. It's a learning and improvement process. It's the activities. We heard Mike talk about it. It's really the activities that we're doing.

And so, the magic in this isn't really in the execution of the checklist or the implementation or having Ops Managers and supervisors following the lists someone else created, the magic is in the process that individuals and leadership teams go through in the development, execution, iteration and learning from their own leader standard work development.

So, here we were doing leadership and it worked other people, pushing leader standard work on other people. And that's not the point. And I know that we're talking about leader standard work here, but we've all seen this in other things, too; like five hours in daily meetings and visual management and all the things.

So, we didn't iterate. We didn't start small. We didn't focus on a specific problem we needed to solve. We went all in with a four-layered tier program trying to hit a home run on the first week.

Now, I wish I could say that we learned that lesson and did things differently, but we actually made similar mistakes later on as well; trying to turn these tools into programs.

And I know that a lot of you are doing the same thing, because I hear it. Those are the questions I get asked.

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Now, look, I'm not saying never to a program, I'm just saying that you should challenge yourself every time you think you need one.

Think about the key takeaways from Mike's conversation last week. Leader standard work is actually the activities. It's not the checklists; it's the activities. The tool is meant to help you build a habit. And that habit should help you solve a problem. And you need to start with yourself. You don't start with the leaders on your team. You start with yourself.

And you probably want to start with one thing. Start with one thing and then you can add on to it and you can build it. And when you use a tool, you've got to make sure has a method for planning, tracking and reflecting. You may want to coach or a guide. And don't try to build a leader standard work system yet. Instead, use it as a process to build habits and skills and knowledge as you improve and solve problems.

The learning and improvement is in the process. It's in the journey. It's not in the deliverable, the outcome, the destination, the checklist, the board.

So, if you're going to make a leader standard work program, instead of doing it the way we did it – Let's not do that – I want you to think about how you can develop a training and activity process that leaders can go through with their peer leadership team, so that they go through the process of creating their own leader standard work, focused on problem solving and development and habit building and getting better.

Look, as Mike said, you can add on the tiered stuff and the standardization and the coaching elements later on, but don't jump straight to it. Help people learn by having them do it themselves.

All right, here are your next steps. If you decide that you have a problem in your work that would be helped through leader standard work, whether that's starting your own or improving your own leader standard work, then I want you to start with your work.

Think about what the problem is. Why does that problem matter? What's at risk if you don't solve that problem? And what makes you think that leader standard work would help you improve? So, that's first is for your own work.

Now, here's the second part of your next step, if you were thinking about doing leader standard work as a program for your managers, for your supervisors, for the team leads on your team, then I want you to hit the pause button. Go back and listen to last week's episode again and then talk it out with a colleague. What do you think is your best next step, based on what you heard? All right, that's your homework.

Now, I'm working on a podcast episode, with video playback, showing several different leader standard work templates and tools that people are using. It's going to be a few weeks, though, before I can pull it together because it involves interviews with several different people. So, stay tuned for that one.

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If you're on my email list, I will send you an update once I know the release date of that leader Standard Work Templates and Tools episode. If you're not on my email list, then head over to [processplusresults.com/podcast](https://processplusresults.com/podcast) and sign up to get at it.

And don't forget that you can find all of the podcast episodes related to getting more of the right things done as a leader in one place. Just go to [processplusresults.com/time](https://processplusresults.com/time) (T-I-M-E). [processplusresults.com/time](https://processplusresults.com/time). All right.

Now, while I'm working behind the scenes on the Leader Standard Work Templates and Tools episode, we're going to move on to an interview that I actually didn't think was going to be related to this Time topic, but totally ended up that it was.

So, next week, Dorsey Sherman joins the podcast to talk about team member engagement. Make sure you tune in. And until next time.