Leader Standard Work Tools: Real World Examples (Part 1) Featuring Kara Cuzzetto

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.

When we start talking about leader standard work, the most common questions I hear are about the tools. What tool and why and how it should be used. And what about this and that scenario? In this conversation, we didn't start there.

So before you listen to this episode, be sure to go back and listen to Episode 29, Leader Standard Work with Mike Wroblewski.

It will really help give you the framing that you need to think about when you're exploring the tools. Now, what we're ready to talk about now are the tools. I know you're so excited and we're actually going to have two episodes on this.

So here's what's going to happen in this episode. I will share my thoughts on kamishibai or card systems for leader standard work. Then Kara Cuzzeto will share a tool that she used. Next week, Robert Olinger and Steve Kane are each going to share the specific tool or method they use.

In all of these examples, you're going to hear what the challenge or the problem was. What were they trying to achieve by using leader standard work and integrating that? Why is the tool that they decided the best fit for them? So this leader standard works? Real world examples and through it you're going to hear some great tips, advice and lessons learned.

Are you a visual learner?

Well, you can see examples of what we're talking about at our show notes. Remember, you can always find our show notes to find more information at https://processplusresults.com/podcast/

This is episode 36, let's dive in.

First, I want to talk about Kamishibai or K cards or T cards, you'll sometimes hear them called. Whatever you want to call it. We're essentially talking about using a card system. Card systems are often used in the standard work that we have in our operations.

We're talking about a leader using a card system to help them exhibit the habits and the routines so that they can consistently develop people, monitor processes, support Problem-Solving and improvement.

Like any tool, there are plenty of variations on how card systems can be used for leader standard work.

Leader Standard Work Tools: Real World Examples (Part 1) Featuring Kara Cuzzetto

I will walk you through a process that I've used and seen as a leader. I'm going to go through the process of understanding the vision of --- what do I want to create and want it to be? The challenges to overcome. What activities will help me do that?

Then I need to prioritize and decide which of these activities I'm going to add into my leader standard work first. I don't want to try to hit a home run the first time. I want to take it a little slower than that. Really hone in on the process and the habits to make something better.

So I prioritize and I make cards for those activities. I'm talking about physical cards. Maybe they're typed or written out. The exact details don't matter. But on my cards, I'm going to have a green sign and a red side. Most often I see them have that.

Now on each card I write out not just the activity. I write out the frequency. And how do I know if I'm successful? It might have the criteria that I'm looking for. The notes of why I'm doing it?
How do I want to show up in that activity?

Not just the name of the activity. But something that helps me identify what green or red mean. What does that say that I was doing that activity effectively? If there's a process that I'm going in to check, then what are the things that I'm looking for?

I usually have a board on my wall. It could be something that sits on a desk or some other system as well. In addition to cards, there's going to be a board on the wall. Maybe this is in my office or out on the floor. It might have pockets that I can slide cards into or hooks that I can hang cards on.

And also on this board is a queue section. That's where they start. So I might have a daily, a weekly and a monthly queue. When they're in the queue, it means I haven't done it yet. That activity is still pending.

When I have done the activity, I then move it over to the pocket or the hook. The section of completed. If it met expectations, meaning I did it timely and it met the criteria or the content that I wrote on it, then it's going to have a green face. But if it didn't meet expectations now the red is facing out.

One side of the board I've got my queue section. I've got a daily, weekly, monthly queue. Details of when I'm going to do something if I have certain days of the week. And timing expectations written on the card.

Then I have a completed section. Where I'm putting green or red. One more section where I'm going to record the factors that are contributing to the outcome.

It could be on the board. You may have a whiteboard next to it. Journal or notebook that you carry around with you. You are documenting. What did you learn from that? What were the factors that were contributing?

Leader Standard Work Tools: Real World Examples (Part 1) Featuring Kara Cuzzetto

So this is the gist of a leader standard work Kamishibai or K card or T card system. So sometimes they're called K cards for Kamishibai, sometimes they're called T cards.

If you go to our show notes, you can see pictures and examples of this. You can find that at processplusresults.com/podcast. Episode 36.

When we're talking about card systems for leader standard work. They tend to work well when you have shared leadership. So maybe you have a team of five department leaders or five supervisors and there are some activities maybe that they're all doing. So they have some activities that every single one of them are doing every single day or week.

You may also have some leadership activities that need to get done, but don't need to be done by all five every week. We might be talking about how they're learning about some problem we're trying to solve. Some auditing type of activities to check the process. So when you have shared activities or shared leadership, then a card system can work really well.

It creates transparency across the different leaders. Makes that work visual. Enables them to collaborate on the challenges. So think about having these five leaders document the factors that are contributing to those outcomes. And now it creates a space where they can come together and collaborate and better understand the problems and the challenges. It also kind of creates that visual way to rotate through the different activities while still building routines.

You can use it in other situations, too. That's just where I've seen it be most impactful. Before using it, I want to put a big old caution tape around it. One of the biggest missteps I see happen. I've done it myself more than one time. I shared back in episode 30. Where I shared my leader standard work gone wrong. So I made the mistake there. I made it after that before I learned my lesson.

I also see it a lot when I visit clients or when I do site visits for other organizations. When it comes to card systems, one of the biggest mistakes that I see people make is that we tend to do card systems to other people.

For example scenario, we're a plant manager, we have those five supervisors that report to us and we want to do a leader standard work. We want them to be better and to have better execution. And so we create this card system and then give it to them to execute. We say "I want them to do this audit on this frequency. I want them to do this activity".

And we put it together and then we say, hey, go do this. And a lot of times not only do we put it together and give it to them to execute. But a lot of times we do it with us in mind. Like what will make it easier for me as the senior leader, as the CEO, or the VP.

Leader Standard Work Tools: Real World Examples (Part 1) Featuring Kara Cuzzetto

I want to make it easy for me to see what's been done and what hasn't. And that's not what this is. Remember, Mike was very clear. This is not a compliance activity. Right. This is a learning and an improvement activity.

I see people do this to other people and they're like, we got their input. They were part of helping us figure it out. They might have gotten their input, but it was still a top down push.

So I want you to remember that the process of developing, executing, learning, iterating and improving and expanding leader standard work, it's really something that leaders should do for themselves or to do as a group. In this case where they have shared leadership, they might do it together as a group, but it shouldn't be done to them.

That's not in the spirit of real leader standard work.

So is a card system right for you? Well, you'll have to evaluate your needs and remember that you want to practice your own leader's standard work and really demonstrate that value before you go and say, hey, managers, you need to go do this.

Make sure that you're doing it. And so what are your needs? Will a card system help you or do you need something different?

As you listen to Kara this week and then to Robert and Steve next week, I hope this will really help you explore the idea of different tools for different needs and help you think through what might be best for you.

Now let's hear from Kara Cuzzetto.

Before her current work in government, Kara spent 17 years in operations management at Virginia Mason Medical Center. Kara's team was doing a lot of great work using lean thinking and working to solve problems and improve processes.

The challenge she was facing was how to lead in alignment with the expectations she had of the team.

So let's hear how she used leader standard work to tackle this challenge.

Jamie V. Parker
Kara, thank you so much for joining us to share a little bit about one of the ways that you've used and practice leader standard work before.

Leader Standard Work Tools: Real World Examples (Part 1) Featuring Kara Cuzzetto

Kara Cuzzetto
Yeah, thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Jamie V. Parker
We're just going to jump right in because we know there are a lot of different tools, tactics, techniques, methods that people can use. And we want to have you walk through and tell us one specific tactic that you've used. What was it? How did you do it?

Kara Cuzzetto
As a team what we created was really on a regular eight by eleven sheet of paper. All the things that I wanted to accomplish in one day, a laminated sheet so I could keep track of my AM and PM Gemba walk. The questions that I wanted to ask as engagement questions. To get a feel for where the team members really were in their daily challenges.

It stemmed from asking the team members to make their work transparent to us as leaders. And as we wanted to hold them accountable in their daily tasks and work, we also needed to be held accountable as leaders in our daily tasks, in our work.

I used this on my clipboard. I walked around with it every day. It had checkboxes on it and I wrote on it with a wipe off pen. If I did not have that clipboard in my hand, I would get asked where my clipboard was. So that's a fun accountability tool as well.

It kind of became an expectation that I would have my clipboard and be walking around with it so I could keep track of the things that were important to us as a leadership team.

We call them everyday ideas. Stopping by team members desks and ask them about their most recent submission in an average daily idea. What was that about? And also asking them about some transparency questions. What are some of the rocks in your shoes? How can I help you remove those.

Being there present and then being able to see me as a leader engaged. Also being able to ask some personal questions as well. Because you're on the floor every day. having four separate teams that report up to you. Being able to show equal attention to all of those team members was really important, too.
So that was part of the checklist. Really making sure that I was completing those tasks every day. That was important for those team members to see printing my daily calendar and posting that on my door. So they knew exactly where I was at any given time.

Having that transparency around my calendar. Making sure that I look at my calendar for tomorrow. And printing off those documents that I need for tomorrow's meeting. Doing some of that external setup for the

Leader Standard Work Tools: Real World Examples (Part 1) Featuring Kara Cuzzetto

next day. All of those things are incorporated in the checklist. It really was just that tool that created that transparency and accountability how we were expected to show up as leaders.

We have expectations and hold our team members accountable to those expectations. We wanted to show that same respect and that same accountability level for the leaders too. Be transparent in how we want to show up every day as a leader.

Jamie V. Parker
This is really interesting. I'm so glad you're sharing this. And for listeners, remember, you can go to the show notes and see an example of the type of form that Kara's talking about.

For example, in her huddle comment, there's a section where she's got Kara's Corner. So I'm guessing that's part of your huddle. And there's a section where you can write in the items that you want to talk about. The items you want to include or questions you want to ask. And there's the meeting management that she talked about and those transparent questions they're written on the form.

Kara Cuzzetto
At the end of the day, taking that wet wipe and wiping that clean.I actually could walk away from my day with a sense of accomplishment.

So often we've accomplished five thousand things, but we have twenty thousand things that we got behind us. You don't get that sense of accomplishment. But being able to acknowledge everything that you were able to compete in in a day. And show respect to your team members and acknowledge their work.

Wiping it clean and being able to start fresh that next day was really kind of therapeutic in a way. being able to really get that "I did something today" that was important.

Jamie V. Parker
Because there are different techniques people can use. And I'm always interested in why that technique works. What made that a good fit for what you needed? And there were several things that you've shared. You talked about. We've got this sense of accomplishment that it gave you.

Leader Standard Work Tools: Real World Examples (Part 1) Featuring Kara Cuzzetto

And you also talked about accountability and transparency. So that the team could become whole leaders. Accountable to how they were showing up and what they were expected to do. Those were some of the needs that were being met by using this technique.

Kara Cuzzetto
Absolutely. We touched on that accountability piece. It's so important for the team members to be engaged in building what that accountability looks like.

My staff helped me build this list. What was important to them is built into this list. Listening to them and coming up together. With what that final output or that final document is going to look like, we're all brought into it. We all have skin in the game.

It's easy to hold each other accountable to those. Because it's not pointing the finger at the person. It's about the process that we went through to come to the agreements together. It's about respect.

Jamie V. Parker
If somebody wants to make their own. One tip that they may want to consider is, do they do that in a vacuum isolated on their own, or should they go ahead and get their team involved in helping them come up?

Kara Cuzzetto
Absolutely.

Jamie V. Parker
Here's the closing question that I'm asking folks. I'm asking you to share a lesson learned either about leader standard work or through the practice of leader standard work. A little nugget you can leave our listeners with.

Kara Cuzzetto
I love humble leadership. is where my heart comes from. And what I've learned is that I don't know everything. The people that do the work and that are the closest to the work. They're the ones that know. Go ask them. See what they're doing. Get out of your office.

Leader Standard Work Tools: Real World Examples (Part 1) Featuring Kara Cuzzetto

It builds such a great relationship and trust. Being able to talk about conflict. Engage in conflict so that you can walk out on the other side with the best product that you can have.

Jamie V. Parker
What's the best way for them to connect with you? and just follow along?

Kara Cuzzetto
I'm on LinkedIn. Feel free to connect with me there. I'm open and willing to connect with anybody that wants help.

Jamie V. Parker
We'll put Kara's LinkedIn profile link to our profile in our show notes. That way you can find her directly. You can see a picture of that sample that she printed out and used on her clipboard at our show notes. That's processplusresults.com/podcast.

Kara Cuzzetto
Thank you, Jamie.

Jamie V. Parker
Thank you so much, Kara.

Really great lessons learned and thoughts from Kara. I love what she brought to the table. And today you heard two examples with different challenges. In our card example that I talked about.

First, it was really about shared activities across a leadership team. That was really the challenge where it made sense.

Now, in Kara's case, she wanted to make sure she was showing up in alignment with her values and the team's values and priorities. And she wanted to create transparency for her work. What she was doing for her team. There isn't one right way to do this. The key is to find what works for you.

Back in Episode 29, Mike Wroblewski suggested that there were three elements that your leader, standard work tool or system should include. Those are;

Leader Standard Work Tools: Real World Examples (Part 1) Featuring Kara Cuzzetto

1. Planning.
2. Tracking
3. Reflecting.

And remember that it's iterative. Just like I shared about daily meetings in Episode 15, "here you start is not where you stay". So how your system starts is not how it stays over time. It's going to improve and it's also going to change as your needs change.

I always want to leave you with the next step.

First, remember, this is a two episode series. It's going to be released Wednesday, April 21st.

Second, I want you to start a list of the factors that you want to consider when either selecting or changing or improving your own leader standard work tool. Doesn't have to be a final list because we're going to add to it, but I want you to start that list based off of what you've heard so far.

Then I want you to listen to that Episode 37, you're going to hear two more examples you'll add to your list. That way you can start making decisions until next time.