

Leader Standard Work Tools Real World Examples (Part 2) - Featuring Robert Olinger and Steve Kane | 037

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.

I am back and we're talking about leader standard work. We've had a few episodes about this topic. We started it back in Episode 29. Where we talked with Mike Wroblewski. It's going to give you the framing that you need to think about the stuff we're going to talk about today.

In Episode 30. I shared Leader Standard Work Gone Wrong. It was my first attempt at leader standard work where I made this big whole program and launched it and I fell on my face like it just flopped.

It's not just a story that's interesting to hear. When you combine that with Mike's conversation in Episode 29 and you take that framing that he gives. Apply that as you listen to my mistakes. You're going to get that double dose of learning. Hear maybe some mistakes that you've made or mistakes you can now avoid.

Now we're in a two episode series. In episode 36 is where we started this two part series. I talked about Kamishibai or card systems. Kara Cuzzetto shared the tool that she made.

There were some really great successes and lessons from Kara's example. This is where we started to shift this conversation to tools, to the how to, to the technical stuff.

Today we're going to continue our conversation on tools. You'll hear two more examples from the real world. As Robert Olinger and Steve Kane share the challenges that they were facing individually. In the leader standard work tool that each of them use to meet that challenge.

Are you a visual learner?

You can see examples of what we're talking about at our shownotes. Just go to <https://processplusresults.com/podcast/> This is episode 37.

First, we'll hear from Robert Olinger. Prior to his current work with Creative Solutions Group and as a university instructor, Robert served 20 years in the government sector where he integrated processes, talent and information flow to improve organizational performance.

When Robert integrated leader standard work into his work. His challenge was that he wasn't getting the most important activities done on a consistent basis.

Let's listen to Robert. As he's going to share how he brought leader standard work, how he started with it. To help him overcome this challenge.

Let's dive in.

Jamie V. Parker

Robert, thank you so much for joining the show to talk about how you use leader standard work.

Robert Olinger

Thanks, Jamie. I really appreciate the opportunity.

Jamie V. Parker

We know there are lots of different ways that someone can practice leader standard work. What is the tool or technique or method that you use?

Robert Olinger

The major method that I use is making my standard work checklist visual. It was a matter of creating my checklist. Breaking it into the frequency.

Creating that checklist and sorting those items based on that frequency. Then printing that off, I stick it onto a whiteboard, use my whiteboard markers to check things off every day, every week, every month.

Having that visual in front of my desk every day was that continuous reminder. Especially when I first started leader standard work. I needed that daily reminder to go do those things. That's what helped me build the habit.

Jamie V. Parker

You've got the task, sorted by frequency, printing it out, putting it on your whiteboard checking it off or making notes or whatever you might do to interact with it.

Robert Olinger

Yeah, exactly.

Jamie V. Parker

What makes this a good technique for you?

Robert Olinger

When I first heard of the idea of leader standard work. I recognized and heard from a lot of people that you need to build the habit. It's not just about the checklist. It's about the habit of activities that you need to do in order to help support your team.

The best way I could figure out to help myself build the habit was to make it visual. Put it right in front of my own face every single day.

Jamie V. Parker

That's a really good point for everyone. Back to Mike Wroblewski's conversation about this. Robert's problem was there were things that he wanted to do. That he didn't have the habit for. They weren't part of his regular routine. Leader standard work helped solve that problem. So that he could then better serve the team.

For folks that say this makes sense, this is a method and I want to try. Any tip or caveat or pointer that you want to give for that.

Robert Olinger

The first thing to start with is to look at the processes that your team does on a regular basis. If you have process maps, start there. Otherwise, just walk the processes and identify those key points where your involvement is really important.

I look at either "Transition points" or "Tough points".

Transition points - Being either information or product is flowing from one division to another. Even just one workstation to another. Those transition points are really important.

Tough points - In a production environment for example. If a truck shows up at the dock and it needs to be unloaded. That's a great time for a leader just to be present, be a pair of hands, help do the unloading.

In a marketing example. You may be sitting with the team working on a proposal or a project late at night, and you bring in the pizza and the beverage.

Look at your processes and identify those key points where your involvement is important. And that's what should be included in your leader standard work. And on that checklist.

Jamie V. Parker

Prioritizing is what you're talking about.

Robert Olinger

Yes, absolutely. We can't be everywhere at once, but we can be in the important places, at the important times to really help people out.

Jamie V. Parker

So I want you to share a lesson learned. Could be about leader standard work or a lesson learned through the practice of leader standard work. What's that nugget that you can share with our listeners who are exploring this topic?

Robert Olinger

When I first started doing Gemba Walks. I made that part of my leader's standard work. It was all about standards. I was always going to do inspections. I soon realized that there's other reasons to do Gemba Walks.

I had teammates that reminded me that, if you just come to the worksite. Have your eyes and your ears open, you're going to learn a lot. And you may identify things that we didn't, but you can learn quite a bit from that.

I also learned simply doing a Gemba walk just to be present. The Gemba walks are great for leader standard work. It's just recognizing the reason that you're going to do those Gemba walks. And it's not always about standards.

Jamie V. Parker

I could see a trap with leader standard work. Like, I'm doing it because it's on the checklist. I'm ready to check it off and really kind of come back to that. but why is it here? What's my purpose? How do I really help support the team, create value through the process.

Robert Olinger

Yes, absolutely.

Jamie V. Parker

We're going to put links to your LinkedIn profile and website for the folks that want to connect with you. But just as for those that are listening and maybe learn by hearing, what's the best way for someone to connect with you,

Robert Olinger

Look me up on LinkedIn. It's Robert G. Olinger. Website that'll be posted. email also It's robert@creativesolutionsgp.com.

Jamie V. Parker

Thank you for hopping on, sharing your experience. I'm really excited just to be able to get some real people doing real work out for our listeners. Thank you so much.

Robert Olinger

Thank you. I appreciate it.

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For our last guest, we'll hear from Steve Kane, who serves as the director of coaching and certification at Gemba Academy. Steve had a different challenge and has a different work experience. His situation, his circumstances of his work are different than what we heard about in the first three examples.

For Steve, all of his work is remote. A large majority of his week is spent coaching sessions with clients. He also has internal meetings. But he still has high level growth responsibilities and project work too.

Steve's challenge is how to balance all of these responsibilities while still being accessible, giving effective time and coaching to clients.

How could he take this chaotic environment and make it work?

Let's hear from Steve.

Jamie V. Parker

Steve, so glad you are here on the show to talk about leader standard work. Welcome.

Steve Kane

Thanks very much, Jamie. It's great to be here.

Jamie V. Parker

There are a lot of different techniques, tools, methods and systems that you can use in your own leader standard work practice. I wanted to ask you, what do you do?

Steve Kane

I do some really basic things. Actually what I do is not my preferred method. It's just what works best. I'd rather do something different.

I work in a completely virtual environment. At least a thousand miles away from my nearest colleague. That really forces me to do everything digitally so I can create visibility for the rest of the team.

Gemba Academy uses Google Enterprise. Everything is on the calendar. Every single thing is scheduled. Even minor tasks I'll put in. I'll put those often as reminders. it's a big, long list of tasks and not feeling obligated to get to anything in any moment.

If I don't get to it today, it's going to automatically advance. So I have so many scheduled appointments during the day that are going to drive me to the calendar. So that becomes like my operating platform.

I frequently tell my colleagues, please look at the calendar. I guarantee you it is one 100% up to date. feel free to use any free time there. So that's what works best for me.

What I prefer to do is hand write everything in a journal. That act of writing helps not only memory, but it helps me think through. If I have these five tasks and have to rewrite it from yesterday's page to today's. I really think through those tasks.

Leader standard work is about being deliberate with your decisions and with your time. Being very disciplined with that helps me be deliberative. The hand writing process really helps.

The digital is great. For me, it's a second choice, but it's highly effective for me.

Jamie V. Parker

Interesting is the idea that what works is really what we have to do. Maybe my preference might be sticky notes, but if sticky notes aren't going to work in my environment, that may not be the best way to do it.

Steve Kane

Yes.

Jamie V. Parker

Everything is in your calendar. This is a different approach. My appointments are in my calendar. So I know when I have meetings, but then all the rest of it is just white space. And then it's something different is where I figure out how am I spending that white space time. And what you're talking about is different than that.

Steve Kane

Yes, The nature of my responsibilities. I have very little white space available. I'm managing 15 scheduled appointments a day. I have to be very careful about how I weave in other things.

As projects grow or move, that's where being very deliberate about it comes in. I have to take a chunk of white space and this project goes in there.

One thing that's great about the digital approach is everything's flexible. I can drag those appointments. I can move them. Because inevitably it happens to all of us. Almost every day something's going to disrupt your plan.

Having a solid plan allows you to adjust quickly. That one little disruption can really throw us off track when we don't have good plans.

Jamie V. Parker

I feel like you're like talking to me right now. I struggle with the discipline side of it.

I have a lot of thinking and creative work. Building new content and figuring out problems. How am I going to address this? What's the right sequence of development tasks for a leader I'm working with?

So there is a lot of this thinking work that needs the white space. I have the white space. But when that white space happens, the last thing I want to do is that.

Steve Kane

Right. The way I look at white spaces, that's unprotected space. Unprotected time.

I need to protect my time. One of my personal rules is that I do not work evenings. I do not work early mornings and on weekends. So I have to make it work during the regular eight to five.

If I don't respect my boundaries, nobody else will. So I have to be very good at protecting those boundaries and being highly effective on the regular eight to five day. So that there's no need to get pulled into the after hours type work.

Leader standard work methods allow me to be effective with that. Choose what to do during the day. And that doesn't mean that I don't ever take time off or have my thinking time or relax, but I do protect it.

This is so important to me, being very deliberate with time as my calendar is available to all of my clients.

Today I have 101 Coaching clients. so they can all just pop in when they need to. I encourage them if you see anything that's available Book it. So I use a scheduling service for that.

Jamie V. Parker

Your coaching clients are your priorities. But then there's other work that you have to do. You have to make sure that it gets scheduled. Or else you're going to get to the end of the week that it didn't happen.

Steve Kane

Right. The whole leader standard work approach. I'm not going to claim to know the origins and true philosophy behind it and all of that. What it is to me is being as effective as I can for the people that I serve.

The time that's available. I have to choose when I'm going to have conversations. When I'm going to do individual contributor work. When I'm going to stop and just think or stop and read. Taking 20 minutes to read unlocks my brain. Allows me to be more creative. And get through a lot of task work. So that has to be intentional.

Jamie V. Parker

You've got over hundred clients that have access to your calendar to schedule stuff. And you use the structure of leader standard work to take some of that chaos away. You're able to make better decisions and choose how you're going to prioritize what you do so that you can solve these problems.

Steve Kane

Yes. I'm a people pleaser and I try to accommodate everybody. I hate letting people down. I don't like to say no. However, following a solid leader standard work method. One of the benefits that I've gotten out of this is, on a digital calendar, your time takes space.

So it's a really good visual that you can see if this fits, that doesn't. It really drives a yes no decision making. It just makes it so simple. It's either moving on to someplace where it will fit or deciding that's just not going to happen.

Jamie V. Parker

This makes the decision making process easier.

Steve Kane

Absolutely. It's like a puzzle game that the piece doesn't fit. Something's coming up. Maybe something else has to go. But it's causing me to make better choices about how I can serve my clients.

Jamie V. Parker

It's all in one place. It's all right there. It's all right to your point. You have the reminders that are carrying over for the things aren't day specific. That's what's really enabling the better decision making. versus the "It's all in my head".

Steve Kane

We're all capable of making a certain number of good decisions in a day before we just get fatigued and need rest. Leader standard work takes a lot of that noise out of my daily life.

Einstein and Zuckerberg wear the same thing every day. They don't want to waste a good decision on selecting clothes.

I don't want to waste good decisions on what I am going to do today. With Leaders standard work things are well standardized. I have a certain amount of time to take on some tasks. That becomes very simple.

An overburdened mind loses creativity. Leader standard work helps me to put places in my day to free up my mind. To relax just enough that I can get back into better decision making. More creativity and better service to people.

With Gemba Academy, we were founded by three people back in 2009. One of them is Kevin Meyer. Kevin was my boss in my last job when I was in medical device manufacturing.

When I was on his leadership team there. He actually told us, "I literally expect you to have 30 minutes a day to do nothing. Put your feet on your desk and unwind your mind sometime in the middle of the day. So that you can re-engage with creativity and be more effective".

Because if you're overburdened, what are your personal interactions like with people that you serve? But if you have time in your day, where if you build that into your process. You can reignite your creativity. people will feel that as well.

Jamie V. Parker

We talked about some of those tips and why this work and how it is going to be effective. Even this lesson learned of needing some of that space to unwind, in order to enable creativity to happen.

Steve Kane

Leader standard work isn't always about ticking off tasks. And in getting to your meetings and doing all of those things. Sometimes it's about protecting yourself so you can better serve.

Jamie V. Parker

Thank you so much for sharing this today. I really appreciate it. It's great to have you on the show.

Steve Kane

Thanks. It's great to be here.

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Both of these were different challenges, like in Episode 36. In Robert's case, he was struggling to get the most important things done consistently. That's when he decided to start with leader standard work.

He talked about how he really iterated that process to move beyond a compliance checklist to make sure he was getting stuff done. Also to make sure he was showing up for the right purpose.

So when he did a Gemba walk, was it for presence and relationship building? Was it for performance learning? process improvement focus? He updated his leader standard work to help him know the purpose of each activity and help him stay aligned with how he wanted to show up.

You also heard Steve say that his digital calendar method isn't his preferred method, but it's the best fit for his current circumstances. He talked about how he protects his time while still being accessible and having the bulk of his time scheduled by more than 100 clients.

It sounds chaotic. But leader standard work is how he addresses the challenge and makes it work for him.

Over this two episode series. Episodes 36 and 37, I talked about when a card system may be a good fit. And our three guests shared different challenges they were facing. And different ways they used leader standard work and made it work for them. For their needs to help them overcome these challenges.

Remember that 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 there were three elements your leader standard work tool or system should include;

- Planning.
- Tracking
- Reflecting

Remember it's iterative.

Just like I shared about daily meetings in Episode 15, "Where you start is not where you stay".

What is your next step?.

In the last episode...

You started building your list of factors that you want to consider when deciding what type of tool you want to use.

After hearing two more examples, I want you to revisit that list. Has anything changed in your thought process? Anything new you want to add?

Then I want you to decide whether you're starting leader standard work, changing the tool or improving your leader standard work tool.

What do you want to move forward with? And what makes that tool, that system a good fit for your circumstance?

Remember, you can see examples of the tools discussed today at our shownotes. That's <https://processplusresults.com/podcast/> This is episode37.

If your leaders need help overcoming challenges and may be through a leader's standard work or building better communication skills or developing their own beliefs and behaviors...

Then let's talk about how I might be able to help.

Just click on the "Schedule a call" button at my website <https://processplusresults.com/>

Until next time.