

## Four Elements of Effective Lean Leadership | 082

Hey, friends, Jamie, here. Real quick before we jump in with today's conversation is remember that we're making a change with the podcast and starting in March, we are going to move to an every other week episode schedule, so we're still going to release on Wednesdays. But instead of releasing every Wednesday, it'll be every other Wednesday. So here's what to expect. Starting in March, you will see an episode March 2nd, then March 16th, then March 30th and on and on. So just want to give you that quick reminder that starting in March, we're moving to every other week?

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.

[00:01:04] What are the four elements of effective Lean leadership? You know, back in episode 13, all the way back in November of 2020, I shared my own definition of Lean leadership, and the next step I gave in that episode was to evaluate your own definition. What do you think I'm missing or where are you aligned? Where are you not aligned?

Well, one of our listeners didn't just take the next step, but she actually reached out so we could talk through it. And it was a great conversation. It made me think. And as a result, I actually added an element to what I think is effective Lean Lean leadership. So here's what I initially shared as my own description of Lean leadership, which is to serve and develop people through human interactions and relationships towards the achievement of goals that support purpose.

Now my client, Manny, and one of his team members, Robbie and I hope to hopped on a video call and talk through some thoughts that they had, and we talked about what it looks like and what it sounds like. And then copy our listener. Robbie posed a challenge. Essentially, she wants to know, you know, what about my definition, made it Lean or made it good leadership, positive leadership aligned with continuous improvement and respect for people?

And she said, you know, couldn't command and control management align with that definition or description, right? Or couldn't a great people leader do this, but kind of think against or operate against Lean norms, you know, maybe they value batching or they own all the decision making, for example.

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[00:02:34] So remember, here's what I started with to serve and develop people through human interactions and relationships toward the achievement of goals that support purpose. So here's the thing I could kind of see what she's saying, right? I mean, I guess if you're serving and developing people, maybe that could be the qualifier. You know, originally my thought was that by not just saying goals, but specifically goals that support purpose that would kind of bring this greater good piece into it, right?

Like this purpose of greater good. But you know, Rothy's is like, Well, what if I say the purpose of the organization is to deliver consistently high returns to shareholders? Well, then what would happen? Hmm. You know, this really led to a great conversation between the three of us, and when I think about Lean, I really think of two things I think of learning and I think a value.

And you know, learning is at the core, but value is kind of why we're learning so that we can create more value. And isn't that interesting that the word value was actually nowhere in my definition of Lean leadership? So let's take this a step further. Here's what I think is the biggest difference between kind of the fundamental beliefs we hold as Lean thinkers and Lean Lean leaders versus kind of that traditional capitalistic command and control approach management, right?

Ready for it. And that is, it's creating more value for all stakeholders, not just shareholders, but all stakeholders, team members and their families, our stakeholders, suppliers, vendors, the community and yes, customers and shareholders also, but only as a piece of stakeholders that all stakeholders in.

[00:04:20] That's why I think this definition really kind of needs a fourth element compared to what I started with, and that is creating more value for all stakeholders. So let's go through all four elements, and I want you to think about your leadership, your strengths and opportunities.

So element number one, to serve and develop people. And this is it. In my opinion, it's the number one job of a leader, and it needs to be purposeful and planned. We don't just trip and fall into serving and developing people effectively in order to do this. It has to be intentional. It has to be planned. So element number one, to serve and develop people now, element number two through human interactions and relationships, bottom line leadership is a relationship.

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Now I know that as Lean thinkers, we love the process. The thing is that while our work is made up a process, our organizations are made up of people. So as a leader, how I interact with people is at the core of my function and role. It's through human interactions and relationships, is how I lead.

Now, element number three is toward the achievement of goals that support purpose. So this is direction results, performance outcomes, achieving goals, but notice that this element pulls in alignment, its goals that support purpose mean that we're developing people through our relationships so that we can better achieve the goals that move us closer to true north. So toward the achievement of goals that support purpose, this is our true North alignment.

And element number four, the result of all of this is that it's creating more value for all stakeholders. Now we just talked about this element, this is Lean. This was respect for people, respect for humanity, continuous improvement. This is this greater purpose that we're creating more value for all stakeholders.

Now I know that when we put all four together, it's kind of a mouthful, right? You're not going to necessarily go walking around saying it. All right. So Lean leadership is to serve and develop people through human interactions and relationships toward the achievement of goals that support purpose so that we create more value for all stakeholders.

So the way I look at it is more of like bullet points, the four elements, the four bullet points, the four elements are number one to serve and develop people. Number two through human interactions and relationships. Number three, toward the achievement of goals that support purpose and number four for creating more value for all stakeholders.

Now, when I have shared this, I've been asked So where do Lean tools and systems fit in daily meetings? Visual management standard work leader standard work Gemba Walk. And here is my answer is that those should be used for a purpose. They should help us solve a problem or that should help make work easier and better.

[00:07:28] But they are not the goal in and of themselves. That's not the objective in and of themselves, right? Lean leadership is not like checking off a checklist that says, Oh, I have daily tier daily meetings

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and I have visual management and I have standard work and I do Gemba walks and I do leader standard work, and therefore I'm a Lean leader. That's not what it is. It's not. Those are not the objective. So where do they fit in?

Well, those may be the methods that we use to serve and develop people, or those may be the cadence of activities in which we interact with people or those. It may be what we use as we work toward achieving our purposeful goals or processes and systems we put in place to help us solve problems so that we create more value for stakeholders. So they're all relevant, but they're not all required and they're not the end objective.

Now what I've seen is organizations have some success with tools or systems and find out that there's still something missing. Tools and processes and systems and methods are all great, but leadership is a relationship. Remember Dave Connor talked about this in a previous episode in our executive series, and they had been practicing this for years, but there was still something missing. And that's really kind of where I come in.

[00:08:43] Is this this intersection of People leadership development with Lean thinking with operations management and so really helping Lean thinking leaders learn to interact with and with people and develop people on purpose? But here's the thing. When you read the books and the articles and hear the keynotes and watch the videos, you'll hear advice to Lean practicing leaders to show, respect and involve and engage people and build trust, facilitate teamwork, challenge and support. And yeah, sure, of course. Right? We know all of this.

But in practice, it's just not that easy. Look, I know that you know how to be a good human being. You already know and are right, a good human being. You already know how to be a good friend, how to do relationships. You know this, you do this, you have success at this.

But when we get into work environments, we get more factors and complexities added in. And now all of a sudden, it's not as simple. It's not as easy. You know, you think about your work. You don't get to choose everyone you work with or everyone on your team. You know, that's a great thing about me. And choosing

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my friends is that, you know, I personally really struggle with arrogance and I struggle with selfishness. Right.

So those are just two things that I just don't value. I struggle with with being around people who display that a lot. So I choose not to be close friends with people who display that those characteristics a lot. Now I can still, you know, be casual friends with them. They may even be in my family, but I'm not going to choose to be around them all the time.

[00:10:36] I'm not going to choose to build deep relationships with them. But you don't get to choose everyone you work with. You don't get to choose everyone on your team. And by the way, someone else may value something different. And so you've got all of the team dynamics of people not choosing each other. Then you introduce a reporting relationship, which inevitably involves power.

Even if you are a collaborative focused leader and you work hard to, you know, have collaboration and you're not a power tripper. Guess what? There is still a cloud of power imbalance that hangs over the team. It is there and it exists, and you can't just ignore it. And then we have both individual and collective goals, and then we have complex systems and problems and challenges like supply chain anyone. Right.

So now we're adding into the mix this other stuff. And guess what? You're also under pressure. You're under pressure to deliver results quickly. And so when you mix all of this stuff in a big old pot of business leaders often need additional help to figure out how to develop people, engage people, build trust, facilitate, facilitate teamwork, support and challenge, write all other things you see in a book.

And so while we get it, we read this like, Oh yes, of course I want to respect people. Of course I want to engage people. Of course I want to build trust. Of course I want to facilitate teamwork. But the how to do that, how to do that effectively, when you got this big old pot of stuff mixed in and complexities mixed in isn't always obvious.

[00:12:12] But it is a skill that can be developed. So when you think about combining this people leadership with continuous improvement and Lean, while the activity of a Gemba walk or a daily meeting could be a helpful process in cadence to have, it's not particularly helpful if we don't also learn how to

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show up in those interactions, how to ask good questions, how to create a positive foundation, to work from how to listen effectively. How to give correcting feedback. How to have productive conflict conflict. Right.

So this is why this intersection of operations management, which is we got to get stuff done and we got to build our product. We got to serve our clients, whatever it is you do. We got to get stuff done and we've got to do that in an operationally sound way. Continuous improvement and Lean thinking, Right, so how do we have this improvement culture, this learning culture where we're always creating more value and then people leadership this intersection of the three of them?

Because once you get all three of all three of these working together, right, then you're able to have leaders who effectively serve and develop people through their human actions and relationships toward the achievement of goals that support purpose, ultimately creating more value for all stakeholders.

That's when you get an ROI on your investment and Lean. So when you move in, move from event based everyday improvement development, these four elements, these are my elements that I believe are the four key elements to effective Lean leadership, right? And so what I want you to do is I want you to do an evaluation on your own leadership against these four elements.

[00:13:52] You can start maybe with a plus delta. What's working well and what could be better if I, you know, did this right? If I? For each of the four elements, you can go deeper and think about, well, what's at the core of your thoughts and your beliefs, your thoughts and beliefs that maybe drive some of that, but do an evaluation on your own leadership against these four elements. Number one, to serve and develop people. Number two, through human interactions and relationships. Number three, toward the achievement of goals that support purpose. And number four creating more value for all stakeholders.

What's working well and what could be better if. And if you are an executive or a leader of leaders, I encourage you to consider taking it a step further and think about your leadership team. Right. So think beyond just your own individual leadership, but then think about the leadership team, the collective leadership against those four elements.

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Now, as I close out this episode, I want to give a big thank you to Ropy for challenging me and engaging me in conversation and deeper thought, being a continual learning learner and having the courage to reach out and share. All right. That's it for now. Until next time.