

## Lean and Mental Health: How to Help People with Gemma Jones | 083

Hey, listeners, heads up. This episode discusses topics of suicide and mental health.

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.

**Jamie:** [00:00:37] Today, we're talking about something that may seem heavy, but it's also critical, and our guest is giving each of you access to a resource to help. So I really encourage you to listen all the way through this episode and then to share it. I am proud to introduce you today to my friend Gemma Jones. Now, Gemma started her career in engineering and quickly found a passion for improvement.

She spent 20 years in manufacturing, in R&D, and then in 2018, she founded her own business, Spark Improvement. Gemma's mission is to help organizations be the best they can be through a combination of Lean thinking, Toyota Kata, visual facilitation and experiential learning. Now, I've had the opportunity to get to know Gemma through our involvement in Women in Lean and in Kata Girl Geeks, which she co-founded and leads, and she is brilliant and funny.

She has great capabilities in helping people learn through what she calls micro learnings, as well as through the use of visuals and drawing. And she has a mad mural design skills. Today, though, we are talking about the intersection of continuous improvement and suicide or mental health.

You probably don't know this. But I live with depression now, my doctor and I, we found a medication routine that works for me and it keeps the really hard days away. So it's still there. I'm a crier. I cry a lot. Some days are hard, but it's not the I can't get out of bed for days experiences that I've had in the past. When I tried to stop the medication, though, that does start to creep back in. So it's something that I live with.

Now in our discussion, Gemma is going to share with you that in the U.S., one out of five people have mental health struggles, but it's not just a statistic, it's real. I am one of those one in five, and so are some of the people in your span of care. But Gemma is not just going to share the statistics. She's going to share specific actions that you can take and a resource to help you help people. Let's dive in.

**Jamie:** [00:02:57] Gemma, welcome to the show today.

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**Gemma:** [00:02:59] Hi. Hi, Jamie, how are you?

**Jamie:** [00:03:01] I am great. Thank you so much for joining us. And before we get to what you learned in the resources that you've built for folks, I just want to start off and ask a little bit about the background and the prompt. So what prompted you to kind of go down this path of work and and researching this and coming up with this resource?

**Gemma:** [00:03:22] So three years ago, I was a continuous improvement manager for a manufacturing organization, and I'd been in CI in various guises for about twenty two years. So really passionate about improvement and business improvement. I had a background in engineering and I had this real love for Lean thinking and, you know, helping people solve problems.

But always and I was lucky early on to be mentored to into this space in terms of believing that people were super important and that respect for people as a sort of underpinning everything we did in Continuous improvement. So I saw it as very important that I spent a lot of time talking to people, building relationships, building trust so that they would open up to me so that they would allow me to help them improve their processes and systems so that they were they so that they'd get on the bus.

And so, you know, that had always been something that was really important to me. Now at the time, as I said, I was a CI manager and I was working closely with a colleague who was in a supervisory level in production. And he was really, really passionate about CI as well and really wanted to develop the problem-solving capabilities of his staff. So he'd approached me and he wanted to build some kind of a training workshop, a practical training activity to help teach his staff how to problem solve more effectively.

And so we'd worked together for about six months to develop this, this sort of practical hands on workshop with a with a workbook, and we worked together really closely. And it came to the day of the training for us to deliver this training. And he was kind of in the first cohort of people that we were kind of piloting this on. And it came to the day and he came in the office and said, You know, I'm too busy, I can't come, you know, there's so much going on.

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And I thought, that's that's really strange that he's, you know, he's not making time for this training. It's only a couple of hours, you know, this is very strange. Anyway, he seemed a bit stressed. I knew there was a lot going on blah blah blah. So I. So I let it go. I caught up with him. In the next couple of days. He did seem stressed there was stuff going on, but he seemed like he was handling it.

And then I came into work two days later to find out that he died by suicide. And you know, this was a massive shock, a massive shock to me and to everyone around us. We didn't know how to respond. I didn't know how to respond. Lots of people were coming to me because I spent so much time building up these relationships and trust, and I saw it as part of my role to sort of talk to and support people.

**Gemma:** [00:06:07] And I didn't really know what to say. I didn't know how to behave. I didn't know what to say and what not to say. So I, you know, I quickly did some research. I did some Googling, you know what, what to say? And there's loads of resources out there and that was really helpful. And basically, I learned that it's just about listening.

Like, just go listen to people, just go hug people, just go listen to them, which was kind of helpful because I knew I could do that. You know, as a CI person, we get used to listening and learning how to do that. So. So I did that. And then I also, you know, I I did some more digging around and found out some of the statistics around suicide and mental health, which which really shocked me, really shocked me.

So, yeah, it it was, and it was difficult, and at the time I was really filled with quite a lot of guilt and shame that he hadn't come to me and I couldn't have. I didn't do anything and all of that. So it was a really, really tough time. It was a really hard time.

**Jamie:** [00:07:10] Yeah. And I think that those are probably, you know, really human reactions to have feelings of guilt or shame. And you know, I'm always surprised at how many of us have been touched by suicide in some way. And you know, there's there's probably somebody listening right now who has, you know, had some sort of similar experience, and they've also experienced some of that helplessness, feelings and things like that. And so, yeah, it's it's a very real situation.

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**Gemma:** [00:07:43] It is. And you know, a lot of people at the time said to me when I would share with people that, you know, my grief and how I felt, and that I felt ashamed and that I felt guilty. And they would say to me, Gemma, there's nothing you could have done. And you know, a lot of people said that to me, and they meant, well, they meant well and they were trying to make me feel better.

But I could not accept that there was nothing I could have done. Like, I just couldn't believe that that that was OK, that this was OK, that this many people or that my friend couldn't have been helped. And when I, you know, one of the things I did after the event, I went and did some mental health first aid training because I thought, I want to be in a better position. I want to be better able to cope with this, and I want to be better able to help people. And maybe I can learn how to spot the symptoms. Maybe I can learn how to know when I should jump in and be able to help people. And you know, I learned so much. It was just a two day training course.

**Gemma:** [00:08:45] It was very low cost and it was amazing. It was hard. It was hard going emotionally. But it's a very good course and I learned a lot about symptoms and I looked back and I could see those symptoms in my friend. So, you know, and I became convinced that had I known and had I had the better, better skills of observation and of understanding, I believe I could have stepped in and I could have done something.

And they taught us very much on the course that suicidal thoughts are temporary, usually temporary, and they're almost always based on unclear thinking. And that's when it got me to thinking about CI's all, about bringing clarity to thinking. It's all about overcoming obstacles. It's all about making good decisions. It's all about problem solving.

So it just got me to thinking that as a CI person, we have these skills and these particular kind of tools and techniques that we use to help people think clearly, overcome obstacles, you know, embrace change. What if we could use those to help people as well as processes? You know what, if we could actually help people when they're in that situation?

**Jamie:** [00:10:04] Well, so so what is I know you've been working on saying, Hey, you know, it's not OK for me to just say there's nothing we can do, right? And so you've been really exploring this for a while.

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Yeah, I guess maybe if you want to tell us what some of what you learned about suicide and mental health just kind of in general as you've as you've done your research.

**Gemma:** [00:10:28] Ok, so eight hundred thousand people a year die by suicide. So that's that's one person every 40 seconds like that's across the world, so this is like to me, these numbers flawed. You know, it's shocking. It's hugely shocking when you think about, you know, it's just crazy. It's 90 people an hour. Wow, 90 people an hour take their own life. And those numbers are underreported because in some countries, suicide is illegal. So, you know, those numbers are a conservative. That's a conservative number, you know, but an outsider even just thinking about about suicide.

If you think about mental health in the UK, one in six people are living with a mental health issue, and in the US it's one in five. So, you know, look around you at the people that are around you. Some of those people are struggling, you know, are struggling now, not necessarily to the, you know, to the suicidal end of the scale. But they do say that one in five people will have suicidal thoughts at some point in their life. Wow.

Now, for me, that is it's just I found it so hard to cope with those numbers. And if you look, if you're a man and you're under 50, if you live in the UK or the US, if you're a man and under 50, you're most likely cause of death is suicide.

**Jamie:** [00:11:54] Wow.

**Gemma:** [00:11:55] So you know, when I when I found that out, I came home. I have two teenage boys and a husband. Mm hmm. And I'm thinking, Hang on a minute. I was worried about you, you know, crossing the road or, you know, being hit by a bus or in the swimming pool or, you know, an accident happening. And actually, what I should be worried about and focused on actually is your mental health.

Obviously, we need to worry about the other things as well. But that hadn't crossed my mind and I didn't realize how prevalent it was. And so that was kind of what stirred up the urgency in me of this isn't a one off random, bizarre event that's happened to my friend. Actually, this is this is, you know, this is happening all over the place. And I just I really feel like we should do something about it.

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**Jamie:** [00:12:48] Mm hmm. Yeah. And you have done something about it.

**Gemma:** [00:12:53] Right, right. I'm trying.

**Jamie:** [00:12:55] So what? So what is your challenge? What is your what are you trying to do?

**Gemma:** [00:13:00] So so my challenge, the challenge I wrote for myself back last year. I'll read it to you now. I have it on a sticky by my desk. So my challenge is, wouldn't it be wonderful if I have encouraged and enabled the global community of CI professionals to actively tune in to help people think clearly overcome obstacles and embrace change?

**Jamie:** [00:13:24] Hmm. Well, that sounds like such a wonderful challenge and a worthy challenge and a challenge that would change lives.

**Gemma:** [00:13:34] I hope so. I hope.

**Jamie:** [00:13:36] Ok, well, let's let's talk about it then, so so your hypothesis essentially, hey, we as improvement practitioners and leaders, we have skills and capabilities that and I think trust probably you would say like we built trust with folks. And so we are kind of uniquely positioned to be able to help with, you know, kind of mental sort of mental health and suicide prevention, not necessarily as like, you know, therapist experts by being able to see it. So tell us what what you think we could do.

**Gemma:** [00:14:10] Ok, so number one is, you know, you can go a I put a resource board together and I'll give you the link to share with your listeners. But this is a report, a resource board. It's currently on mural. It'll eventually be on a website as I as I progress, but I wanted to get it out there as quick as possible.

So there's first of all, there's some training you can do. So there's a link on there to a free training. It's 30 minutes long and it's about suicide awareness with the Zero Suicide Alliance in the UK. It's UK based training, but it's online and it's available to anyone in the world.

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It's a wonderful 30 minutes to spend, understanding a little bit more about how you could respond and react and how you could spot and help people. So that's number one. That's 30 minutes.

Get a coffee, go through that training, you get a certificate at the end and it's a wonderful thing and share it with as many people as possible. That's an easy thing to do. And number two, you can also go and do what I did and do mental health, first aid of training.

**Gemma:** [00:15:10] So that's available in most countries. It's certainly in the US and the UK, and that's the two day training or similar that I did. That really helps you. Now I should say you're not once you've done that training, you're not a therapist, you're not a counselor. It's just like being a physical first aider.

You know, if you're a physical first aider and someone in your workplace breaks their arm or has an accident, you don't go in and fix their arm. What you do is you kind of, you know, you see that it's happened. You patch them up and you get them the help they need. So that's being a being a mental health first aider is no different.

We're not there as a counselor. We're not there to solve the problem. We're not there to help them through the whole episode. We're there to notice when something is wrong, you talk to them and help them in that instance, make them feel better in that instance, if we can, and we're there to signpost them to get the help that they really need.

**Jamie:** [00:16:06] So that's just so interesting too, Gemma, because most, you know, kind of at least in, you know, manufacturing and a lot of organizations have dedicated first aid or safety, you know, kind of coordinators who who are trained and they are the responders.

**Gemma:** [00:16:22] Yeah, yeah. We just need people to respond to mental health issues as well as physical health issues. And also, the other thing I want to say about that is when I did my training, I noticed that most of the people on the training course were from the HR field, were from the HR team. Now that's wonderful and they do a great job, and they were all wonderful people on my course.

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But the thing I kept thinking when I was there is if I was in an organization and I was struggling and I had a problem, HR is probably not the place I'm going to run to now. Now, you know, some organizations that might be different and they may build up those relationships. But in my experience, that's not that's not necessarily the case.

So I felt actually it's direct line managers, we need in this room on this training. And also, I, you know, I believed at the time and I still do that, see why people could be in that room because they're the ones very often that have built relationships and trust across the board with people at all different levels, you know where they don't report to them.

So there's no, you know, there's none of that dynamic and that issue about will I not get promoted if people know I have this problem? Am I going to be disciplined? You haven't got that kind of dynamic, but you have got a dynamic of trust and respect. So if we can get those people on that training, I believe they're out there in contact with people and they have the relationships with people where there may be more likely to share or you're maybe more likely to notice. Mm hmm.

**Jamie:** [00:17:53] Okay, fantastic.

**Gemma:** [00:17:55] And there's some other resources on the board as well. There's some documents you can download a there's some information about what I call the change curve, the kind of emotions that everybody goes through when change happens. So if you're especially if you're a CI person who's changing something in an organization, you know, people are going to be affected by that emotionally. But also, you know, they they also very well could have change happening outside of work.

That's nothing to do with the work you're doing, but that can still be relevant. So. So yeah, there's and there's some other resources around questions to ask and books to read, and there's examples and links to other other resources. On the Web, I sort of see it as a central place that people could go to, that they can then find other resources.

**Jamie:** [00:18:42] Yeah, well, and I think this is interesting too, as you talk about the change curve and, you know, just some of those interactions that we have. You know, I think in general, I know when I am



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working with organizations on change and really anything but is that, you know, work is personal. We are human beings. And this whole idea that we learn that like, you know, I use the analogy of the movie A League of Their Own.

I don't know if you've seen it. Gina Davis and Tom Hanks, right? And he says there's no crying in baseball. And like that kind of analogy in our business that like it needs to be professional, we need to be professional. And somehow that means that we aren't emotional beings is like, really kind of does a disservice. And that, you know, the change is about emotion and we need to create that opportunity for people to experience and be able to share and talk about that too.

**Gemma:** [00:19:33] Absolutely, absolutely. There's a lot of, you know, I've been in manufacturing all my working life and you know, there's not there's often not a lot of talk about feelings and emotions. And I've I really try to get people to talk about those things. Not necessarily, you know, their personal, their personal feelings about personal things.

But if we can get people to talk about their emotions and their feelings about work stuff, you know, even just, you know, even if we're asking someone about an issue that they're having, you know, how does that make you feel asking that question? If people can get used to and it can become more normal to talk about feelings, then maybe people would be able to talk about their feelings and their emotions when it's something very personal and something they need to share, because I think we too easily kind of expect people to lock it away, you know, and not talk about this in the work environment because it's not appropriate or it's not professional.

You know, like you say, we're all human beings at the end of the day, and for me, that should take precedence over anything else. Yeah. And we should be able to talk and share about our feelings. And if we did that, maybe these statistics wouldn't be what they are, right?

**Jamie:** [00:20:43] Yeah. So I'm as I'm hearing you talk, it's kind of like, so if I can tell you, Hey, you know, I'm really angry about this change right now because I, you know, I feel like I wasn't consulted or whatever, and I'm struggling with this. And if I'm able to start having those conversations, then, you know, if I am in that space and I need help, I might be more willing to ask for. It makes so much sense.

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**Gemma:** [00:21:04] Absolutely. And I think one of the one of the techniques we can use around that. And one of the things you know that I'm really passionate about is visual facilitation and drawing. And, you know, sometimes people can find it easier to draw what they think rather than what they say, because sometimes we don't have the words, we don't know how to describe it.

So as an example, if I'm process mapping with a team, I'll often get them to draw facial expressions, just emojis. Just think about emojis on your phone, you know, really simple smiley face, cross face, sad face, angry face draw those above the steps of the process. And sometimes, well, often actually that that can really help you as the as the facilitator get a whole other level of understanding about the process.

Why have you drawn an angry face there? Oh, because I hate this. I hate this. I have to do it every time, and it's a waste of time. Oh, right, OK. Why have you drawn a frustrated face? Oh, because I have to, you know, I have to go and find the thing, and it's never there and you just get a whole other level. And I do believe that encouraging people to be able to talk like that and encouraging them to learn how to express their emotions in a productive, in a productive, constructive way. You know, potentially could really help.

**Jamie:** [00:22:18] Yes, for sure. All right. So you have built this resource and I have been there and it's fantastic and I love it. But I know and right now it's a mural which you have such great skills in, so it's very beautiful on top of it. Some of our listeners have not been into murals. So are there a couple of tips you can share? We'll put the link in the show notes, but for folks when they go click on the link, a couple of things that they should just be aware of to help them kind of navigate that and use that effectively.

**Gemma:** [00:22:46] Ok. So one thing it doesn't mural doesn't work brilliantly on a phone. So you you can get into it and you can see. But it's not very easy because there's spaces where people can add comments and you won't be able to do that on a phone. So it's easier if you're on a on a desktop computer or a laptop.

Second thing is it doesn't work via Internet Explorer, so don't try and get in there. If you're using Internet Explorer and you'll need a different browser to that, and I can give you some details about the browser things to use it. It asks you to put in your name and your email address, but you can. You don't have to do

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that. You can just click Enter as a visitor, so you don't have to have a mural account. You can just enter straight away.

So hopefully, you know, eventually I think this will be a website, but I just I wasn't prepared to wait any longer for me to. Get that together, so it was kind of get this out quick, I'm I'm adding things to it every day, so it's work in progress. It's not it's not the finished article, but yeah, my the urgency around getting it out was greater than trying to make it perfect.

**Jamie:** [00:23:50] Yes. And I think the one other thing I would add is that I love the you put the table of contents. So like when you're looking at them, you're on the right side. Like, you just click on the next thing and it goes to that thing and then you click on the next thing and it goes to that. Or if you want to go back to something, it's very easy to navigate. And I just think that it's got some great resources, both in the document as well as links out to other resources available.

**Gemma:** [00:24:14] Cool. Cool. Thank you. Yeah, I've I've tried to include as much as I can without it being, you know, overwhelming and too much on there. The space at the bottom for people to add notes and comments. So if they've got ideas of something to add, you know, a couple of people have added links and suggested that I add it to the board and then I've added those resources. So so yeah, I'd really love feedback from people and ideas and comments.

And there's also, you know, it's really important to me. There's a space in the bottom right hand corner for people to to add a sticky note if it's helped them help someone because that's ultimately what I want to do is help people help people. So if you've if you've used anything on there and that's that's been of use to you and you feel like you've helped someone with something, please do let me know on there.

Please add a sticky just saying like, yes, it was useful, and that's all. I don't need to know any details, and you don't need to share anything else with me. I just I just want to know that this is being useful.

**Jamie:** [00:25:08] Yes. Fantastic. Well, we will put the link and it's, you know, some instructions and stuff on our show notes, so everyone will want to go and check that out. You know, when you think about what we've heard, Gemma and what you saying today is that this is a real problem. And I think for so many

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people that have been touched by suicide in some way, we recognize it. And even if it's even it's just mental health, maybe not to suicide level, but mental health. You know, we it's something that we can help people. And so I love having this, this resource you put together.

**Gemma:** [00:25:39] Wonderful. I'm so pleased. Thank you.

**Jamie:** [00:25:42] All right. Well, we're going to wrap up. So I just have one final question for you, which is, you know, for our listeners out there, what words of maybe advice or encouragement would you leave them with today?

**Gemma:** [00:25:53] Go out and listen, because that's what this is about. Go out. My favorite question in the world is what's on your mind from Michael Bungay? One of the resources on the board. Go ask people what's on their mind and just listen. That's that's what I think is the key to most of this. And if we can, if we can do that more, then maybe people will talk.

**Jamie:** [00:26:15] Fantastic, great advice, thank you, Gemma, for joining today.

**Gemma:** [00:26:19] You're welcome. Thanks, Jamie.

**Jamie:** [00:26:24] I am so proud of Gemma. She isn't just accepting the situation as it is, but she's taking action to do something about it. And guess what? I am thrilled because later this month, I get to meet Gemma in person for the first time at Kata-Con. I am speaking there. And Gemma Jones and fellow Kata Girl Geek Susan Clancy are flying over the pond to do some live coaching cycle rounds at Kata-Con.

If you are interested in Kata, I definitely recommend you get yourself to Kata Con this year. It's March 17th and 18th at Jekyll Island. We will put the link in our show notes for you. Now you also want to go to our show notes so you can find those at our website. Its [ProcessPlusResults.com/podcast](https://ProcessPlusResults.com/podcast), then you going to find this episode, which is episode number 83.

There, you're going to find the link to the mural board that Gemma put together with all of the resources that we talked about, as well as links to connect with Gemma on LinkedIn and to learn more about her

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work at Spark Improvement. So again, you're going to find that link at process plus results. Rt.com Forward Slash podcast This is episode number 83, and we will link to the resource board that Gemma put together and talked about today. All right. Thanks for tuning in. Until next time.