

## Kind Leadership in Operations Management with Karyn Ross | 085

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:** [00:00:29] Feedback, difficult conversations, conflict, performance management. These are responsibilities of leadership. So how does kindness, how does respect for people play into those leadership responsibilities? We'll keep listening. Our guest today, Karen Ross, is on a mission to activate people to create a kinder, better world.

Karyn is founder and President of the New School for Kind Leaders, as well as the Love and Kindness Project Foundation, which is a registered public charity. She created both of these initiatives to help people around the world think, speak, act and lead more kindly. A few months ago, Karyn hosted me on a video series she facilitated called Cultura de Excelencia, where we talked about going to Gemba as operations leaders. So I'll make sure that in the show notes, you can find the link to that YouTube video. For this episode, we're going to dive in and talk about kind leadership.

**Jamie:** [00:01:36] Karyn, welcome to the show today.

**Karyn:** [00:01:39] Jamie, thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited to be here.

**Jamie:** [00:01:43] I am so excited. You're here. This is going to be a great conversation.

**Karyn:** [00:01:47] I agree.

**Jamie:** [00:01:49] All right. Well, let's kick it off. I always start with this question and really just want to know a value mantra principle, a quote, you know, whatever you want to pull from, but something that embodies your beliefs about leadership.

**Karyn:** [00:02:02] Well, I'm going to say the one that I'm going to give you today is super simple, and it's the best kind of leader is a kind leader. And oftentimes, people don't think about the words kindness and

## Kind Leadership in Operations Management with Karyn Ross | 085

leadership together for a whole wide variety of reasons, but as leaders, we want to help people learn and grow and develop.

We want to make them feel secure and confident and raise problems to us. We want to make sure that our organization people feel psychologically safe and physically safe. We want to eliminate fear and create trust. And as leaders, unless we're kind, those things aren't going to happen.

If people are in fear, they're not going to raise their hand and they're not going to say, there's a problem here. They're not going to feel safe to say, I made a mistake. They're not going to feel safe to bring their whole authentic self to work so they can give us their fabulous, creative and innovative ideas. So the best kind of leader is a kind leader.

**Jamie:** [00:03:12] Oh, I love it. It's so simple, but carry so much with it. Well, so this is a lot of the work you've been doing right now, actually. And I think your most recent book, which is *The Kind Leader* and as you know, as a practical guide to eliminating fear, creating trust, and leading with kindness. So why don't we dig into this theme, then we because you're right, I think that, you know, kindness and leadership. What does that really mean? So when you say kindness or kind leader, what are you? What do you mean by kindness here?

**Karyn:** [00:03:42] Ok, it's super interesting, and I'm going to hold up a copy of my book *The Kind Leader*. And when I wrote it, I was really interested in talking to leaders and hearing what they thought about kindness and leadership. So I invited twenty eight very fabulous leaders to give me their views for the book. And one of the questions that I asked all of them in their kind leader interview was How do you define kindness? And it was really interesting. Because they stopped and they would say, well. You know, someone is kind when they and they could tell me about an act of kindness.

Oh, someone dropped something on the ground. Someone else picks it up and gives it to them. Someone leaves their wallet, you know, or person gives it to them. But when it came to actually defining what kindness was. They really had a hard time doing it, so I created a definition of kindness, and that definition of kindness is that kindness is an action or set of actions, and that action or set of actions ties

## Kind Leadership in Operations Management with Karyn Ross | 085

our own internal feeling of empathy. So our ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes and to see things from their perspective, not our perspective, right?

**Jamie:** [00:05:07] Yeah.

**Karyn:** [00:05:08] And then compassion. So when we're seeing something from somebody else's perspective and we understand and we feel they're suffering, we really want to do something to alleviate that suffering. Kindness is that act or action. That we take based on those thoughts and feelings to create a positive Outcome or impact for someone else? Hmm. So that's really what kindness is, and we can see it in all different kinds of ways.

We can see lots of different kinds of actions that we can take and sometimes we have to really remember, especially as leaders, the last part of the definition, the positive outcome for someone else. Because leaders tend to, you know, we think about a leader is someone way out at the front right when they need it, we're in charge. We need to think about what's happening for us. This really has to do with that action we take to have a positive outcome for those we lead.

**Jamie:** [00:06:19] Hmm. Yeah. So and you know, as I'm listening to you say this, that it's, you know, there's something about being able to really be more purposeful. I don't know if it's more purposeful, but understanding the impact right is that because I don't know that it has to be like this big.

Like, I thought this out kind of a thing, but understanding that there's an impact because I think you're right sometimes, particularly for operations managers and operations supervisors who you're just like kind of trying to get through the day and you got numbers to hit and there's so much. I got to get this goal and I've got this project and I've got this deadline, all these things. I think sometimes we get so caught up on that we forget the other side of it, the other person, correct.

**Karyn:** [00:06:56] And I think when you think about that, exactly for operations supervisors is that often we're focused on the ends. The thing, right? Yes. The number to hit the goal, to make the project that has to be handed in on this particular deadline and we lose our focus on the means how that's going to happen. Well, none of that's going to happen without people's involvement, right?

## Kind Leadership in Operations Management with Karyn Ross | 085

And those people, we need to consider how they're they're feeling, how they're doing. Are they overwhelmed with too many things to do? And I really like to use the word deliberate. And it's such an important word because there's a difference between intentional and deliberate. Intentional means we're planning, right? So we have a plan. We know we want to do a certain thing deliver.

It actually means that we have a plan and we're conscious. And the effects that the choices that we're making have on others. And nothing is going to happen on the shop floor without people doing the work. Yeah, you got robots. Someone's got to program them. Somebody has to take care of them. People aren't machines. We have to really focus on being kind to people.

**Jamie:** [00:08:24] Yeah, I think that's so important when you make that distinction between this huge focus on the ends versus thinking about, well, how do we get there? And the real kindness plays in leading other people, particularly for those folks who are leading teams and, you know, on the shop floor and all of that.

**Karyn:** [00:08:41] Yeah. If people are afraid, they're not actually going to be able to do the things that we want them to be because when we're afraid we have either fight flight or freeze, right, so someone's going to fight you about it, someone's going to run away and not do the thing, or they're going to be like a deer in the headlights and afraid to do something. Mm hmm.

So kindness is the thing that eliminates fear and creates the trust that as leaders, we need people to have in us and we need to have in them that they're going to do the things that are going to make sure that the ends happen. Yeah.

**Jamie:** [00:09:18] Well, and thinking about this too, you know, I think sometimes this like the work kindness, you know, there's like a fear if I'm, you know, leading a team, leading an operations team. And, you know, I'm kind of fear that I'll be like too soft or that, you know? Well, I mean, I just I don't want to be taken advantage of or if I'm too soft, then work won't get done. You know, so. So talk to us about that. You know, this association that sometimes gets made here,

## Kind Leadership in Operations Management with Karyn Ross | 085

**Karyn:** [00:09:46] Right? And I think part of that comes from not having a definition of kindness, right? From not having any idea of kindness and mixing up the idea of kindness and being nice. When we think about being nice, we might kind of gloss over something we're just playing.

Somebody comes to us and brings us something that's a difficulty or a problem. And honestly, we're busy and we really don't want to deal with it, and we don't understand why it's a problem for that person anyways, because shouldn't they just get over it? And that's the way we do things around here now that we say to them, Oh, OK, no problem. We're sure. And then we go away and we feel, oh, that person. Why are they even asking that that's taking advantage of me? Or if I say yes, you can have this day off to go to spend with your child for their play, then they really should be focusing on work.

But again, there's a difference between kindness and niceness. Kindness means we are going to put ourselves in the other person's shoes, think about things from their perspective, and then we're going to think about what's going to make a positive outcome for them. So if someone comes to you on the shop floor and constantly wants time off. The nice thing to do might just be to say, Sure, sure, you can have it, but actually the kind of thing to do is start to look and say, I wonder why that person comes every Monday morning or every Thursday and wants to have this amount of time off. Is there a problem that they're having? Why are they having so much absenteeism?

And if we actually don't deal with those things and we don't go and we talk to the person and say, Hey, this is what I've noticed and hear what's happening from their perspective, we miss an opportunity to actually help them, and maybe the person is engaging in a behavior that's destructive or self-destructive, or they have so much absenteeism that in the end, we're just like, OK, we don't want to keep this person, we want to fire them. And so we do. But actually, we were not very good in not helping them to overcome whatever that problem was.

I do my best and it's part of our thing kindly behaviors to assume positive intent that people come to work. They want to do a good job. Yes, they're working for a paycheck, but they really want to contribute to something more than they could ever do on their own. I'm not going to assume that people want to take advantage of me. The truth is that is not the way I see the world, because that's not the way most people I've met are.

## Kind Leadership in Operations Management with Karyn Ross | 085

**Jamie:** [00:12:09] Yes, I'm a big assume, positive intent person as well. Like I got, I have to start from that point. So what you're talking about is, is that the niceness part or what? You know, the nice thing to do can really actually be an unkind. It's a disservice to them. And I think that comes up a lot when we talk about feedback and, you know, maybe difficult conversations where sometimes leaders and shop floor supervisors will kind of avoid situations or gloss over situations or like, you know, tiptoe around it and sugar coat with all the things because we're trying to not hurt somebody's feelings and be nice, but it may not really be for the positive impact for the person.

**Karyn:** [00:12:55] Correct. And although sometimes we couch it in the language of I don't want to hurt somebody's feelings. The truth is, actually what we don't want to do is spend the time and figure out how to do this. And it's going to take us more time. It's going to be harder. Yes, it's true. The person might be upset. And we're going to have to deal with the upset and maybe we're not comfortable with people talking about their feelings. So a lot of times that niceness actually has to do with us. Hmm. And it's not focused.

**Jamie:** [00:13:29] Yeah. Is it? Yes. Is it really? I don't. Right? Is it really that I don't want to hurt somebody's feelings or is it really that I don't like? I don't want to be, you know, have to do something that I'm afraid to do?

**Karyn:** [00:13:42] Exactly. And the truth of leadership is, although oftentimes we talk about leaders, their out in front, they're the leaders. A leader's job is to lead other people. Yes, we have to be responsible for getting things done, but those things are only done through people and our main responsibility is leading other people. I can do my best to be nice and I can be kind and make sure that I'm helping to develop them, even if it's difficult for me to do and it's going to be difficult for them to hear.

I can have a difficult conversation. I can have it in a way that doesn't break the person down. That doesn't denigrate them. I can talk about the behavior, right? I can help them make a positive. That's what respect for people is. Respect for people is believing in helping someone to do more than they ever thought they could do and be more than they ever thought they could be.

## Kind Leadership in Operations Management with Karyn Ross | 085

**Jamie:** [00:14:40] Yes. Yeah, absolutely. So let's talk about then. All right, for operations leader, shop floor folks. You know, people who are listening who, you know, are saying, Hey, I want to do this, I want to show up in a way that is more kind. What are some thoughts you have about whether it's next steps to take our next steps they can take or things they can consider to be a more kind leader?

**Karyn:** [00:15:05] Ok? First of all, I would say the best first step and the easiest first step you can do is get out from behind your computer and out from your office and go down to the shop floor and take a look at what the people who have given the precious time of their lives to create the products that your customers needs are doing. Get to know them as people. Do you know all of their partners and spouses names, do you know their children's names? Do you know if they have a pet? Do you know what their hobby is?

**Karyn:** [00:15:45] Get to know them as people. Because then once you know them as people, we don't we don't have to be kind to things, right? Mm hmm. We need to be kind to people. So when we know our people as people. We're going to be able to engage that empathy and that compassion a lot more. So that's the first thing is go to see.

The second thing? Ask people how they're doing, not just what they're doing, but how are you doing today? Oh, what are you struggling with? Oh, I see that you've done this like now three times looks like that's a little bit frustrating. Like looks like you want to bang your head against the machine and go, argh, like a pirate. Can you tell me something about that? Then listen, listen with open eyes, open ears, open mind and an open heart, because it's no point to ask a better question or to ask an open ended question if you actually don't have any interest in the answer. In fact, it's probably best not to ask.

**Jamie:** [00:16:49] So true. Yes.

**Karyn:** [00:16:53] And then listen and understand. Oh, I have this fabulous person standing in front of me and they're telling me something, and maybe it's not what I want to hear. Right, I don't want to hear that we need to really buy another machine that's going to cost us a trillion dollars, right? Or that they can't do their work because we just do not have the right tools for them. We don't have the right supplies. It's

## Kind Leadership in Operations Management with Karyn Ross | 085

uncomfortable for them. They're exhausted by the end of the day. We might be thinking to yourself, Well, that's not the way I think about it, but that's what that person is telling you.

So we have to see. We have to hear. We have to think about it and we have to open our heart to hear somebody else's perspective. And those are really the easiest things that you can do. If you're on the shop floor and you see someone struggling and you just feel frustrated and tired, give yourself a timeout. Make your time with that person to go and talk to them where things are nice and quiet and really listen. Those are my best suggestions. First, easy steps to take.

**Jamie:** [00:18:00] I love it. That's one of the things I always get feedback on from the podcast is, Hey, you know what? I like that you provide actionable, actionable steps. I'm so glad that you were able to kind of say, Hey, here are things you can do that you can even start doing today,

**Karyn:** [00:18:13] And you can make a list of all the people on your team. And actually, The Kind Leader is full of exercises like this. Make a list, write the person's name, write a column for your spouse or partner children's names, pets, hobbies and see if you can fill it in if you can't fill it in. Well, now we've got some good visual message. Yeah, you need to go and ask some questions and find out, right? Yes. Yeah.

**Speaker3:** [00:18:43] Ok, wonderful.

**Jamie:** [00:18:45] Now, before we close, I just want to make sure everyone knows we're going to include links to the book and to your website and to LinkedIn and all of those things. So if you're listening this and want to learn more,

**Speaker3:** [00:18:56] Make sure you go to [processplusResults.com/podcast](https://www.ProcessPlusResults.com/podcast). And we'll have all of these details in the show notes so fantastic there. That is super kind, and we're going to close and wrap up. So Karyn, just thinking about our listeners, which, you know, our improvement minded operations leaders, you know, you've provided a lot of tips here, but what would you leave them with as far as encouragement or advice as we close out today?



## Kind Leadership in Operations Management with Karyn Ross | 085

**Karyn:** [00:19:23] You know, I remind them actually of two things. The first is that kindness and kind leadership is a practice that takes practice. So remember, the definition of kindness had to do with action so we can think about being kinder, we can think about being better leaders, but until we actually go out and practice that. We're not going to make. We're not going to make a difference.

And the second piece really goes with that, which is that no one is perfect. Nobody is perfectly kind all the time. No one leads perfect with kindness all of the time. We're human beings. And when your practice doesn't live up to the standard that you really wanted it to be kind to yourself, because the wonderful thing about practicing kindness and practicing leadership is that we don't have to wait very long for another opportunity to practice comes come along, and it will probably be there like in the next two minutes, right? Right. Yeah, you practicing. That's the way to create better, kinder work environments that are trusting, less fearful and also a better, kinder world.

**Jamie:** [00:20:33] Fantastic. I love that. Thank you so much, Karyn, for joining and sharing what you've learned and what you've put together around being a kind leader.

**Karyn:** [00:20:43] Thank you so much and for your kind leadership team.

**Jamie:** [00:20:49] You know, I really loved Karyn's point at the end about also being kind to yourself. In fact, Karyn and I are co starters for the influencer table within the Women and Lean group. And when Karyn first asked me last year to see if I would be the co starter with her, one of the biggest reasons I said yes is because she and I have some differences. We kind of approach things differently and and see things through some different lenses.

And I thought it would be great to be around someone who thinks and acts and approaches things differently than I do. And one of those differences is that Karyn is very deliberate in how kindly she speaks to herself and how kindly she speaks to others when she makes mistakes or when people disagree or, you know, something is happening, maybe there's like fear involved, whatever it might be.

And so this is an area where sometimes I tend to beat myself up a little bit or have kind of some comparison or get worried about things. And so partnering with her on that project has been an

## Kind Leadership in Operations Management with Karyn Ross | 085

opportunity for me to see more of that kindness to self in action. Now, I also think this whole point in conversation today about kindness versus niceness is important.

Think of respect for people. It is disrespectful to that person, right to an individual, to a person on your team to avoid giving honest feedback that is needed to help them improve or to help them adjust their behavior so they can be more helpful to the team. To avoid that would be disrespectful to them. And it is also disrespectful to the rest of the team to avoid addressing challenges. You don't have to be mean, but avoiding it, beating around the bush, couching it to a point where the team member doesn't even actually hear the message they need to hear. Well, that's not being a kind leader, either.

As Karyn and I were talking about this topic, I was thinking of a meme that I've actually seen floating around about brutal honesty. And I don't remember exactly what it said, but it was something like honesty doesn't have to be brutal or take the brutality out of honesty or something like that. And I think that's exactly what part of this message was today is that we can be honest and compassionate. We can be honest and kind. And as a leader, we have a responsibility to do that when it comes to unhelpful behaviors.

We don't have to go and like be honest about everything. Throw it all out there. But when it's something that's related to how a team member behaves in a way that impacts the team or some feedback that they need to hear so that they can improve and develop and grow. Look, that's our responsibility. So remember that at our shownotes process plus results dot com forward slash podcast, you will find links to Karyn's website, to her LinkedIn, to the book, and we will also link to the YouTube of the video we did Karyn and I did a few months ago for Cultura de Excelencia. All right.

Let's talk next steps. So Karyn gave some very specific actions that you can take. And what I want you to do is every day over the next two weeks. I want you to do one of those, any of them, but do one more than what you normally would, right? So I know you would normally do some of this, but I want you to take it a step further and do something a little bit more than you normally would and be really present as you do it. So as a quick reminder, here are the actions Karyn provided.

**Kind Leadership in Operations Management with Karyn Ross | 085**

[00:24:34] Number one, go to Gemba, go to the floor and engage with people. Number two, ask people how they're doing, not just what they're doing. Number three Listen with open eyes, open ears, open mind and open heart. And number four, get to know your team as people, not just as team members. All right, that's it for today. Until next time.