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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.

Yes. Competition. It is a serious human dynamic and when done effectively, it can help to maybe push some drive for some people. But there's also a big potential downside from it. In fact, I will record another episode about the downside of competition in operations. But short story just know that I've made bad decisions and I've seen a lot of other bad decisions made because of competition.

The thing is that sometimes as an operations executive, we get scared about reducing competition because we're afraid the drive will disappear. We're afraid motivation will disappear. We're afraid our teams will settle into status quo. So what else can we do? Well, that's what we're talking about today. Now I know the last episode. I told you that it would be my last episode for the year recorded in Colorado, and that is true. But this one is still not being recorded from my new temporary home office in Indiana.

We actually just recorded this episode at a little peer mini mastermind at the beach. So I'm recording from the beach right now. Now, in this episode, I am joined by my friends Tracy O'Rourke and Katie Anderson. We will link to their information, their books, their podcasts in the show notes. Remember, you can find those at processplusresults.com/podcast.

Now on the outside we are all Lean or Lean leadership consultants. We all work with similar organizations. We all do similar work. And from the outside, it could look like we're competitors. But in this episode, you're going to hear how we choose to take an entirely different outlook and shift away from competition and instead toward collaboration so that we can lift each other up. And I think there are lessons in here for everyone. All right, let's dive in.

Jamie: [00:02:42] I'm Jamie V. Parker of process plus results.

Katie: [00:02:45] I'm Katie Anderson, Leadership Consultant and author of Learning to Lead, Leading to Learn.

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Tracy: [00:02:51] And hello, everyone. I'm Tracy O'Rourke. Half of the Just in Time Cafe owner with Elizabeth Swan and also the co author of the Problem Solvers Toolkit. And I'm so happy to be here with Jamie and Katie at this leadership retreat.

Katie: [00:03:05] Woohoo! Yeah. Yes.

Jamie: [00:03:08] Awesome. Well, we are at this little kind of leadership retreat, mini mastermind thing. So let's talk about what we're doing, why we're here.

Katie: [00:03:17] Yeah, absolutely. Well, maybe we talk about the genesis. I mean, it was started earlier this year. Jamie and I happened to be at a conference together, hadn't seen each other in years because of COVID. And we were out to dinner, I think, starting to talk about things that were going on in our businesses, what we'd been up to and just like really connected and realized, we had some insights to share with each other, sort of about how we are running our business, the things we're thinking about, how we want to grow our business, the clients we want to focus on and work with.

And we thought, you know, it'd be great to get together and continue this conversation and have a small group of like minded, you know, other consultants to come together to really help each other, think about our business, the things that we don't talk about sort of publicly, but it's so important to all of us. And so that was the the idea that was sparked and how we've come together. And it's been awesome.

Tracy: [00:04:11] It has been awesome. And then I got the call from Katie saying, Hey, I'm planning this little get together. You seem very like minded. We knew each other because I was at the Japan study tour. She invited me down to do this once a year before it couldn't make it. So it was perfect time for me to say, yes, we are trying to get Elizabeth here as well. But that was that was wasn't going to happen, unfortunately. So I'm just I was just so excited to be a part of this. And it has been really fun and productive.

Jamie: [00:04:40] Yes. And what I love so much too, Tracy, about being not like fun and productive is it really reminded me of how important it is to have an outlet, to have people that you can be transparent and vulnerable with, who can collaborate with you. And, you know, really, no matter what your role is or

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kind of the work that you do or even your passions outside of work, but having people that kind of have your back and they're there from a supportive standpoint.

I think so often it's all about competition and comparison and knowing that, hey, this isn't there isn't competition, this is we lift everybody up and how great is that? You know, it's just thinking about if you're an operations manager and there are other plant managers, hey, you don't have to worry about competing. You can lift each other up.

Tracy: [00:05:28] Yes. And what I really liked is I'm sure there was lots of other people that could have come. And there's a lot of people we love. But keeping it small and intimate was really important because we really wanted to focus on each person's problem, keep it small.

And what I love, too, is I mean, I've been doing this 20 years. Katie, you've been doing this, what, 13 years? You've been doing this five years. But it doesn't matter. Everybody's in a different place. We can all learn from each other. We all have different challenges. I learned a lot about and things I didn't even know I was going to learn about.

Just even you talking about Jamie, your your, you know, the nonprofit and getting a nonprofit set up. And so those kinds of talks were really important. And then, you know, we we had to feel like we could talk about things we weren't very comfortable with, too.

Jamie: [00:06:17] Yes.

Katie: [00:06:19] Totally. And sometimes especially be where, you know, Tracy, you have a partner in Elizabeth, but for the most part, like we're independent consultants, practitioners and maybe we work with teams and collaborate with other people. But in terms of running our own businesses, we can be very isolated.

And so that's where that power of having a network of other people that you can tap into to learn from. You know, you guys both have had podcasts. I've been curious about that, learning about how you've set

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that up and how that's helped your business and the thought leadership and being part of a broader community.

You know, I've written a book, Tracy, you've written a book Other Ways that we've all had different experiences and come to the work that we do from different backgrounds, different professional experiences and different personal experiences and how we can each learn from from that and help lift each other up. I think that's just been really exciting and powerful.

Jamie: [00:07:14] Yeah, especially when you think about how much uncertainty there is in this space, right? It's not like there's this, oh, here, here is the right way. Here is the right path. Just like I think for any organization out there, you know, it's uncertainty and you're creating your own path and you might have this vision, but how you get there is going to be something you figure out, you iterate, you problem solve, you fail all of these things. And yeah. So it's not like there's a formula to follow, right?

Katie: [00:07:41] No, there's not a formula. And also, I think we've all said this at different times is like, wow, we've all been inspired by all these different ideas that we could do. But with anything, it's like, well, what's what's what's your personal business strategy? What are your goals? And then what are the things you're going to do right now and what are great ideas? But maybe now is not you don't have to do it. All right. Now.

Jamie: [00:08:04] So, Katie, for you, we were we we got to that one of those points where it was like there was something you were considering doing was like, you know what? Now is just not the right time for that. There's other things that are more important.

Katie: [00:08:15] Yes. And as a creative and I get inspired by things and I'm very action oriented. And I think this is actually the interesting thing. This is what I help a lot of leaders with for their organizations is there can be a tremendous amount of awesome ideas, but which you have a limited amount of resources and limited amount of time, which are the right ones to be focusing on right now. And it doesn't mean that not ever for the other ideas but but to be focused and purposeful around it.

Jamie: [00:08:41] Yeah.

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Tracy: [00:08:42] Yes. I mean, we talked about all different kinds of things. I'm sure people are like, well, what'd you guys talk about? And so I think we kind of started really organically. We each kind of had two questions that we primarily were really looking for some help and guidance, and we kind of circled around those. And then we talked about things like pricing models, licensing models, business structure models, positioning. I mean, it was like it wasn't like we ran out of stuff to talk about, but then we were hungry. We'd go get fish tacos and a beer.

Jamie: [00:09:10] Yeah. Yes.

Katie: [00:09:12] And what I also love, too, is even before we got into the details, we started with each person's personal journey. So I've known Jamie and Tracy for many years, both of them. Tracy's came on my Japan study trip in 2019, and Jamie and I met shortly before that through some other work, through companies that we're both involved with.

And yet I didn't fully know their origin stories and what led them to where they are today. And so to really spend an hour each talking about our how we grew up in our careers and the different choices we made really helped me understand the context and passions that these two awesome women have come to. And I think that just provided a richness of understanding as well.

Jamie: [00:09:56] It did, and I think that's such a lesson for anybody listening in whatever role you're in, in business. Business is personal. It's made up of human beings. And so that applies in any work is, you know, understanding who someone is, what some of their journey is, what's brought them here, what's important to them will give you a different perspective and an ability to help them more.

Katie: [00:10:17] Mm hmm. Right. For sure. And in a business environment, we we so focus on, like, what's my name, what's my role? And then we dive into, like, the the business topic or the learning topic without seeing the human dimension. And something I've learned about how do we, even when we start a meeting or a project, is get back to that human dimension? Even just sharing something personal helps open us up to the more human side, because we're all humans working to serve our business, our

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organization, the team, whatever it is at the time. But if we can get back to the humanity, it really grounds us. Mm hmm.

Tracy: [00:10:51] Yeah, it's so important. And it has been. I didn't even meet Jamie before. I had never met her. And so it was really nice to hear. And I had an aha. I mean, I actually thought Jamie was doing something else and then I'm like, Oh, you do this. And so you were saying, hey, that was super helpful to hear, right?

Jamie: [00:11:09] Yes. This was like the pivotal moment for me is when we're having this conversation. I'm bringing my second question up and I'm talking about messaging or something and just going through it. And Tracy and Katie, you both said, oh, I thought you did something different. I thought you were a lean consultant for operations and now realizing.

No, actually, it really is this leadership, this melding of meshing of operations management and people leadership combined, that there is a process lens to it, but that is actually something different. And how I mean, just absolutely impactful, pivotal, by the way, my podcast name might change as a result. Yes. Why all of that? Yes. And it's one of those things that you really can't do by yourself. The only way to do that is through conversation and dialog and relationship.

Tracy: [00:12:02] And yeah, because we actually were like, Oh, we thought you did something else. And then you're saying you said, I've been really actually struggling with this positioning for a while. I just didn't know what it was exactly that I was struggling with. And you're saying that that helped? So I was like, Oh, well, I'm glad I helped a little, though, but a lot like massive.

Jamie: [00:12:24] Speaking of helping, by the way, Tracy, I think that's one of your takeaways is that asking for help and getting the help you need. Yes. And tell us about that.

Tracy: [00:12:34] I have always been it's always been hard for me to ask for help. Actually, it's it's it's. One of those things. It's my personal life, my professional life. I just try to. Do do do do do. But not doo doo. And it, you know, for many years, I think what I realized coming and talking to you both is you were

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quick to identify when you wanted help with something and you went out and found an expert to help you, whether it was coaching or what was your personal development or if it was an admin.

And I really feel like I've seen a gap in that and that really helped me open my eyes to why am I trying to do it all the time by myself? You know, I, we, I have a few people that I use that are wonderful, but I, you know, my immediate next step is I'm actually going to be looking for some help. So so that was really helpful to see why it is so much better to go that approach. So thank you both for that.

Katie: [00:13:28] Well, it was an aha I had over the last two years as my business has grown and with the publishing of my book and a lot of other things that I was, you know, I can't do it all. But I was burning out and realizing that the greater impact if I want the impact, I wanted to have to really like the thing that gives me so much joy as helping grow and develop other people's capabilities regardless if they're the continuous improvement leader looking to amplify that in their organization, if they're the senior leader really trying to embed this in their organization and looking for how to grow and develop, that is something I'm so passionate about.

But if I'm doing all of the other tasks, I'm not able to do that as much. And so it's about finding that finding that balance, and it doesn't mean you can't do it, but it's also like it's good to have it's good to have help. And that's why that's why I wanted to pull this group together, too, is how could we help each other grow and accelerate where we're at from today?

Because I know for myself I can sit and start spinning alone. And so having other people to react to the things that I'm saying or saying, actually this could be something to help you or even like let me take that off your plate, which isn't what we're doing here so much, but can be other ways to have the greater impact.

Jamie: [00:14:51] Mm hmm. Yeah. Another one of those universal things. Right. So this reflection is so good. It might be something that someone listening needs to reflect on, too. There might be a listener right now. It's like, Oh, that's where I need to spend some time reflecting.

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Tracy: [00:15:03] Mm hmm. So I guess what we're doing is promoting this idea that coming together in small groups with people that are like minded, and we even have some overlap in terms of some of the services that we provide. But it doesn't matter. I mean, it's not a competitive thing. And as a matter of fact, it accentuated how different we are and our different positioning, which I love as well.

So now I, I really know what Jamie does and I'd be like, Oh, I know somebody that can help you if that comes along as well as Katie. So that has been really helpful. But, you know, I think it's easy for us not to like, especially for me, reach out and say, hey, this could really be beneficial and I want to I want to participate in something like this.

Jamie: [00:15:46] Yeah. And I think getting out of that day to day, you have to create the space for this. Right. And so it's not just the space for for this time that we've spent together, but even in our time together, creating space for thoughts or for the breaks or things. So, you know.

Right. Katie, you had this revelation riding the peloton, right? You're on your break. You're like, oh, right. I had a moment. And and so it's really easy. I think sometimes for me, especially, I'm in, you know, I'm busy. I'm doing a lot of work. I've got a lot of clients I'm serving that I love and I love every minute of it. And it's very hard for me to force the space. And this is an opportunity to force some space as well.

Katie: [00:16:26] Yes, we have to you have to be intentional about taking that time to reflect, to think, to have the creativity. And one of the things I really appreciated, too, is we're all professional facilitators. I mean, we all lead retreats, events, workshops like that is like that is sort of the essence of a lot of what we do.

But none of us showed up with I neither none of us are the facilitator for for this. And like we are all using our facilitation skills. But it was an organic sort of coming together and each person having their, their time in space. It wasn't like a one person putting this on for the other people. Like we were all participants in all facilitators at the same time.

Jamie: [00:17:09] Yes. Yes. So that it wasn't here. This is this leader of this event and this leader is driving. Yeah, it's just.

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Katie: [00:17:19] Well, I think we're all used to being like we are often in that I'm organizing this event for these other people, but we are all actually here to be participants. And that's that that's a cool co-creation as well.

Tracy: [00:17:31] Yes, it was really staying focused on how can I help this person that is posing a question. Or a problem. So that was really helpful. And I think coming out of COVID, we're still still not totally out there. But I think it's easy for us to just stay, you know, isolated and so to just say, yeah, we're coming together physically instead of virtually. To me, I think it makes all the difference to, you know, I'm glad we were able to all function in a virtual environment. So happy to be in person again.

Jamie: [00:18:02] Yes, it really is. And I just the level, the deep, I guess the the depth of the relationship building in this short period of time. Right. Like, oh, my goodness. Because Tracy and I had met virtually we had been on webinar type things before, but that's like, oh my goodness, I'm friends with Tracy. Yeah, she is so awesome.

Tracy: [00:18:25] That's how I feel too about the both.

Katie: [00:18:27] Of you know is going to work out. So there you go.

Jamie: [00:18:32] All right. So then maybe either one last reflection point from each of you or each of us or kind of a closing thought of some sort, something that kind of brings this this home. And what's what do we want to leave with today?

Tracy: [00:18:47] I think I appreciated that. And I'm going to make a little contribution to Elizabeth, who hasn't been here. But we were thinking of you the whole time. And what I. You had mentioned in a webinar something about theta waves giving time to process. You know, that waves kick in when you're doing something mindless, kind of putting laundry away or running on a peloton or, you know, some some physical activity. But you're set a wave start to spark. And I really appreciated that. I felt like it helped Jamie, it helped Katie, it helped me.

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And that time of silence, even, you know, I think sometimes I tend to be an extrovert and probably the most extroverted person here, but at the same time, appreciating the silence and the thinking in the in those moments and the reflection, because that's really, you know, we're thinking about the problems. And so that to me was really impactful, too. And because I haven't been in an event like this, it's not even an event. But we were together for three days, so and just feeling clear, having a clarity around how I, I can be better in this world. Right, and be more effective and be happier too. Not just productive, but happier.

So I just have this general content feeling right. And I don't know. And so I want to thank you both for that.

Katie: [00:20:16] Well, I'll build on that because that was my I'm happy to hear that because that was part of my my intention. I had a personal interest to spend some time together because I wanted to talk through and get input on things that I've been thinking about my business. And I also wanted to continue to build on the relationships I have developed in back in person.

I think this space, I'm an external processor and so the the space for me to be able to think through things that haven't been fully formed and to get reaction to my thoughts, to get questions and then to get perspective has been really helpful for me to reflect on. And I think that's a lot of what we do when we're coaching.

It is both asking questions, but there is a time for sort of I don't know if the word mentorship is the right thing, but sharing experiences that can help people to see things from a different angle or to know that something is even possible. I grew up my business. I'm like an accidental entrepreneur. It's been a decade now, but I came from academia.

I was going to be a professor and I love teaching, I love mentoring, I love learning and growing. That is my passion. But I never went to business school. I never had those experiences. So for me, I've been all of my business acumen has been learning by doing and then acquiring coaches. But it's so helpful to talk to other people in this space, to really understand the business side of the business as well, and, and to really help think through that as well as just all the other things about all the creative, creative ideas as well.

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So I've really appreciated that space to think and reflect, also get people to hold up the mirror, to ask questions, to share experiences. And I feel like I'm more grounded and, and have I've really have accelerated from where I was and that was my intention. And so I'm really thrilled that you have had the same experience.

Jamie: [00:22:13] Yeah, awesome. And so it's been really fun, Katie, to watch you as an external processor because so I'm an internal processor like I'm an OC, leave me alone. Let me go into my office or with some post-it notes or something thinking whatever, and then let me emerge in a few hours or days or whatever.

Don't ever put me on the spot. I don't know. I don't know, I don't know. I need time. And so but, but the thing is that they're like this realization one. So it was really fun. I was like, Oh my goodness, this is so different. This is so cool. Yeah. Let her all of her incomplete thoughts just spill out and realizing that I actually I need some of that and realizing that I can have a, you know, I can be an internal processor and have that method. And it needs to be I need to add in external processing with it because you know, this problem about identity and messaging and who am I, what do I do?

I could never have solved that with hours and hours and hours of internal processing would have never solved that problem. And so it was really great for me to realize that I can have leanings and this can be the way I like to do things and I need to stretch beyond that in order to have a kind of more complete impact, right? So that was been really cool for me and I know we talked about this whole like competition versus collaboration, all of that.

I do think that being around people who say there is abundance, there's room for everybody there. Like there is no. It's different than what I am used to being in operations and competition and all of that. And so it's really, it's just so great to find people who are legitimately like, I am so happy for you, and all I want for you is to lift up. And it's never a negative. Like there's it's never an either or. It's always an end.

Katie: [00:24:11] Yes, totally. Like the equation, I love to say, was something Mr. Yoshino said to me when we were working on the book together. That one plus one equals much more than two. And that's

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something that Karen Ross and I have said together. And I feel that way about bringing together community together. The sum of us together is so much more than us individually. And so this really is how we lift up, how we make the world better.

It's about not seeking competition, but rather collaboration. And we can all help each other get better and that there space for all of us and opportunities for growth for all of us. And we're all experts in different things that we may or may not think we're actually experts in, but we have experience in that can help other people. And then the things that we're working on, others can help us. So it's really powerful and wonderful.

Tracy: [00:25:02] Yes. And thanks for bringing that back to because that was that was something that I agree. The abundance having we all have that thought of. We're here to help each other. We're here to hold each other up. It's an abundant world. There's abundance. There's room for all of us.

Jamie: [00:25:17] And giving my time to help you does not leave me with less time. Mm hmm. Right. Yes. Like my the. So the time or the energy or the effort or whatever the input is, money, whatever it is, whatever I invest in helping someone else is not does not leave me with less. It leaves me with more when I go to help or support or give.

Katie: [00:25:38] Yes. Well, that's a great message to end us on. It is message of abundance of helping, and that the value of us together is so much more than what we can create alone. We can all find communities, and it's about reaching out to people and not feeling isolated.

And regardless of your in person or it can be done remotely or it can be just one person, or it can be a group. And there's, there's ways, but it's, it's being willing to ask for help and to give help. And I think that it's a two way street. And so that's I think the the value as well.

Jamie: [00:26:20] Woo. How fun is this? You know, in this conversation today, you heard messages about collaboration over competition. You know, diversity of experiences and learning from each other, listening as we share and how having a network and a support and a community. Right. How important that is. And that you might need to do some outreach to find it.

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And for those of you out there, remember, this doesn't have to be your formal team. You can build community with other people outside of your direct team. We talked about asking for and receiving help. About not trying to figure it all out by yourself, regardless of whether you're an internal processor or an external processor. The human dimension of how understanding the person can help you, help them better. It gives you that context. We talked about uncertainty and forging your own path, about creating space for thought work, creating space for strategic work. And forcing that space. Not just getting caught up in the day to day and also the power of those theta waves.

And, of course, we talked about abundance, about how giving creates more investing time and energy and effort. And money doesn't leave you with less. It creates more. It creates more value. What about you? Which of these messages kind of hit for you today? Which message do you want to do a little more reflection on? I tell you what, I would love if you would head over to LinkedIn and jot a little post and you can tag me and Katie and Tracy will make sure we give you those links in our show notes because we would love to hear what you think. All right. That's it for now. Until next time.