

Supporting Ops Managers to Execute New Routines | 097

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.

[00:00:00] Why didn't she do it? Why didn't she make the adjustment? I just don't get it. That's what a plant manager at one of my client organizations asked me a few months back, and that's what we're unpacking the next two episodes. As we're developing ops leaders, how do we help them improve their execution, their follow through to new or changing routines or behaviors?

And also, how do we help them improve their thinking and their capabilities and their skills capabilities in doing those routines? So ops executives, this is for you, uh, in two ways, both as you're developing your senior and mid-level ops managers directly, some of this will apply to that direct development and also how you are helping them to better develop their supervisors and leads and managers that report to them.

So you can kind of think about it as that dual toned piece. Now remember business is personal leadership is a relationship and leading people and developing [00:01:00] people is situational. So this isn't some sort of blanket rule. This isn't like, okay, now go do this with everybody. And every interaction, this is really focused on specific types of scenarios that we'll talk through today.

Um, but the reason we're talking about it, the reason I'm talking about this specific topic is because I'm hearing it a lot. I'm so frustrated. I just don't get it. Why can't he just do this? We're having the same conversations over and over. All right. Well, for now, let's go back to the plant manager that we started with.

Here's the basic situation. The assistant manager is struggling to deliver performance on quality on delivery and cost on a couple of different product lines. Really she has been for a while. So it kind of feels like a broken record of conversations. I've heard this exactly. We keep talking about it and there's a flurry of activity and chaos, but it's not translating to results.

So we, uh, worked with this assistant manager, applied some lean thinking to create some more visibility into what's happening, um, that allows her to better see [00:02:00] what's happening. And that's when the plant manager was so confused because now this visibility is. And the assistant manager has visibility to better see, but she didn't use the now visible information to change, to adjust the production plan.

The first day she had access right, the first day she could see it so it, this just seemed like such an obvious next step to the PLA manager. Obviously, this is what she should have done. Obviously, this is

Supporting Ops Managers to Execute New Routines | 097

how she should have done it. Obviously on day one, since this change has been implemented, she should have, except is it that obvious?

If the assistant manager had never really done something like this before, or maybe she has in the past, but for the last two years, it hasn't been a thing she's been expected to do in her role. And if she isn't seeing that behavior modeled by the plant manager, remember this is day one since the visibility existed.

And if so, if, if that hasn't been modeled yet, and if the plant manager hasn't said, oh, Hey, here's the information [00:03:00] now that we have now, let's talk about how you can use it to lead your product lines. Then is it that obvious? You know, too often we expect our ops managers to just know, to read our minds, to pick on the subtle pick up on the subtle things that we're doing.

And so, you know, I see this where like the manager or the executive will share with me, you know, I join their tier, their tier one meeting, or I join their chair two meeting and I share this with the team. And so now they should just know how I want it. I want them to message it too. Like really, just because, you know, you did it, but you didn't say anything and you didn't process it and you didn't walk through with a why and all that.

We're just gonna like bias most like, oh, okay, here we go. I saw it once now. I'm good. So this is what I'm seeing. This is what I'm hearing. This is the frustration that managers and executives are coming to me with. And so I wanna talk about. Now there is a caveat, sometimes your ops director and your ops managers and your ops supervisors have experience levels where you don't have to get into the level of teaching and mentoring that we're gonna talk about [00:04:00] today.

But when you're frustrated, because an ops leader on your team, isn't doing what you think they should or isn't thinking the way you think they should. Then I want you to come back to this episode and consider, if anything we talk about here applies. Now the context I want you to remember are the five leadership interactions.

We've talked about this several times before on the podcast. So we'll link to those in the show notes. And remember, you can always find our show notes, our links, and our full transcript at our website processplusresults.com/podcast. So the five leadership interactions exist on a continuum with telling on the left and then moving over toward the right.

You get to asking good questions and then listening for impact. And along this continuum, there are five leadership interactions. And in telling you have directing, sharing and teaching, then in asking you have

Supporting Ops Managers to Execute New Routines | 097

coaching and listening, you have connect. And all five of these are important. We talk a lot about how our default is often on the telling side.

So many [00:05:00] leaders do too much telling and not enough asking good questions or listening for impact, but telling is still a part of leading in operation, particularly when we're teaching new skills or we're having new behaviors, right? we still set direction. We still share advice and perspective, and we still teach skills.

I'm. So let's spend some time talking about how the telling interactions come into play when developing ops leaders and particularly improving their execution to new or changing routines. And this could be because we're changing the routines because we're implementing a new routine or because they're new in position.

So maybe the routines, or the behaviors exist, but because someone is new enroll, now I'm gonna share with you actions for you to consider as you develop your ops managers. Okay. So number one is to set clear direction. Part of leading is giving direction, asking for what you expect. And the key here is to be clear in the [00:06:00] story of the plant manager and the assistant manager.

He never really set clear direction at the beginning. So here's your reflection on this? If there's an ops leader on your team who isn't doing, what it is, you expect the behaviors and the routines that you expect. They're not executing on that. I want you to reflect back on how and to what effectiveness you have set direction, how clear is it?

Could she state your expectations clearly back to you? So that's number one, set, clear direction. Number two is to teach and share the why, what, and. In our scenario, the plant manager did end up going back and setting some more clear direction. Here's what I want you to do every day. At this time, I want you to review X and then make a decision.

Take action on Y. . And so there was some of that that was reset. And sometimes that alone is enough. They know what to do from there and they can move on. But other times you need to kind of teach more about what it is you want, why and how [00:07:00] so the assistant manager hadn't done that level of analysis and adjustment before she needed to learn the mechanics of the activity, as well as the.

Now we'll talk more about teaching and developing the skill, the thinking capabilities in the next episode. But for now this, I want you to know that the assistant manager was pulled in lots of direct different directions. And it could have been better if in addition to setting the clear direction of what we expected at a, like a surface level every day at this time, I want you to go look at this information.

Supporting Ops Managers to Execute New Routines | 097

I want you to take action on it, right? If we got a little bit more clear and we taught her the reasons why this activity would help, how it could help solve problems, how it could make work easier. Now, if there is an ops leader on your team who isn't executing the behaviors or the routines you expect, I want you to reflect on how well they know the why, what and how, how well do they understand the mechanics of the routine and are there opportunities to better teach and [00:08:00] share?

Now, I also I've had experiences where the expectation has been clearly. The leader went through the mechanics, the leader demonstrated the leader, showed that they also knew how to do the activity. Right? The, um, so if you're the ops executive, you demonstrated the ops manager shows that they know how to do it.

So now, you know, it's not a teaching capability, but it still didn't happen. One of the COOs I partnered with had a situation like this, he was clear, he enumerated it. He said, exactly. Step one, step two, step three. And then. Business as usual, nothing changed the broken record of the same conversations over and over.

I mentioned earlier. So this brings me to consideration number three, and that is to walk by their side to support execution. Behavior change is hard. It's not easy to break old habits and build new ones to fall into new routines, or do a step into a role. Where's a bunch of new behaviors and routines and to get 'em all down so you can support your ops leaders by [00:09:00] walking, alongside them as they execute to new routines.

Recently, I was doing some fractional work with a client. And so this was a little different than my normal work, which is more advisory teaching, mentoring, and coaching. This was really like, get your hands dirty. Let's get in. Let's do it. So more of a fractional work engagement. And so together, we kind of built out some new planning and monitoring routines for a couple of supervisors and department managers on both a shift and B shift.

And a startup routine consisted of a pre-shift planning. And then of course adjusting at the start of the shift because you have some unplanned absences or whatever else is happening, some factors going in there. So some pre-shift planning and adjusting messaging in tier one, and then updating kind of an hour by hour type of visual control with some targets.

Then there were check and adjust routines at first break lunch and second break, and then a quick reflection routine at the end of the shift. So here we go from like, not really having many routines at all in regards to how we're leading this line to now having [00:10:00] a startup, a check and adjust several check and adjust, and then a reflection routine that we're wanting to do.

Supporting Ops Managers to Execute New Routines | 097

So we taught the routine activities, right. Standing up here, let's go through an example. Let's go through it together. Here's right. All the thinking. And I'll, I'll again, I'll tell you about the thinking next week, but we taught that we had the, the expectation shared, but then here's what I did. I showed up for the startup routines at the start of a shift and at the startup B shift.

I showed up twice per day to follow up on the check and adjust routines. I showed up on Saturday for the Saturday startup routine. These were some long days, but why did I do that? Because I'm walking by their side to support execution because I'm demonstrating the importance of establishing those routines.

Because I want to be there to help them identify and overcome obstacles to the routines. I'm not so naive as to think that this routine, the way we, you know, came up with it is now just gonna work [00:11:00] perfectly and flow perfectly. Of course, there's gonna be some obstacles. What are they? Right. So wanna be there for that.

This was a shift in how they're managing their lines. I don't just set the expectations, teach the mechanics of the routines and then wait days or a week to be disappointed that they're not doing it. right. I don't just say, oh, here we go. Now go off and do instead, I'm gonna walk it with them. Right? I'm gonna walk by their side to support the execute.

Now, the objection I hear to this is I don't wanna micromanage, but when you do it, right, you're not micromanaging. You're supporting you're there to help and to support, not to command and control compliance, manage. And when you couple this activity with skill and thinking development, which will talk about in the next episode, some powerful magic can happen.

When you're an executive working with a senior leader, it might be a little scaled back version of this, right? It might not be quite as much of walk in their shoot, walk with them side by side, but you're still gonna [00:12:00] want frequent check-ins to be supportive and to help them develop. And when you're a senior leader working with your plant manager and department managers, you don't always need the intensity level.

I just described, right? For every single newer changed routine, you don't have to go to this level of intensity. It's gonna depend. You're gonna have to have some discernment on what should I do in this scenario, in the case that I'm sharing with you, this was a really big deviation from what had been happening.

This was a big change I needed to be there to support. Here's your reflection though. If you're frustrated with the execution level of an ops leader, this is one area I want you to consider. How well have you

Supporting Ops Managers to Execute New Routines | 097

walked by their side and supported the routine, the behaviors that you want. And that brings us to consideration number four, scale back to [00:13:00] create space for the leader.

And the example I've shared, where I went hot and heavy to support a new planning and line management routine. Like it's not that intense forever. When you decide that you need to jump in to walk by their side to support. Then I want you to also be super intentional about giving feedback, giving recognition and scaling back to create the space for the leader to own it.

When you do that, the execution might take a hit, you start scaling back and the execution takes a hit. So that's where you ask questions. That's where you get the leader, the opportunity to correct. You give them some space to fall down and to learn and to adjust. This is different than just setting direction and ghosting them.

Right. This is walking with them and then scaling back a little at a time so that they can gain their foot. So your reflection here on scaling back to create space for the leader is how intentional have you been, or are you being now about scaling back your support [00:14:00] to create space for your ops managers to own the execution while making sure we're giving feedback and giving recognition?

So quick summary, here are the four considerations I shared with you today. Number one is to set clear direction. Number two is to teach and share the why, what and how number three is to walk by their side to support execution. And number four is to scale, back to create space for the leader. Remember that plant manager, he explained why didn't she do it?

Why didn't she make the adjustment? I just don't get. Here are four considerations that the plant manager could reflect on and act on using his own discernment of what might be best in this situation. With this individual, as an ops executive, you want to develop your direct reports, your senior ops leaders capabilities to execute the right behaviors, and you wanna develop their capabilities to do that with their ops managers, teams, how do they continue to develop their ops managers, teams?

So executing the [00:15:00] routines, the behaviors is part one. In the next episode, we'll develop, um, we'll dig into developing thinking capabilities, right? We're gonna take the development side a little bit further and think, not just showing up and doing the mechanics, not just having the discipline to execute the mechanics of the behaviors and the routines, but getting better at the thinking and the decision making that we're doing in those routine.

Now one more thing I want you to think about is that as you take deliberate action to improve execution and to grow thinking capabilities, it starts to expand in other areas. So what I described is a scenario

Supporting Ops Managers to Execute New Routines | 097

where you're frustrated, you're not getting the execution that you want. You've tried all the things, you know, to try and it's just, you know, like you're all having the same conversation over and over, right?

So here are four considerations for you. Of course, you want to develop your leaders and have them develop their leaders. So that level of involvement isn't required as often. And that's the great thing [00:16:00] is that as you go in and do this, you don't, it, it expands to other areas and you don't have to keep doing it over and over to this intensity.

You're developing your team and it gets easier and easier along the. So many of the ops executives and ops managers that I talk to, particularly like director, uh, ops directors, ops VPs, they really love to operate in this strategic space, high level space. And that's awesome. I love to lead from there too, but if you don't yet have the team that can fill in all the blanks that can run the business and run the operation on their, you know, on their own with, while you stay at that high level.

Then you're gonna struggle. I don't know if you remember, there was an episode in our executive series a while back. Where Carrie Siggins was a guest. And she was talking about this as a mistake that she was looking at, you know, executives and, and bringing on an executive. She was looking at executives at, you know, big companies who had achieved great things, but the problem is they were [00:17:00] too high level and they couldn't get into the operation.

And so for a lot of the companies that I work with, we've got, we have to have more of that startup mindset. We're we? Yes, we are gonna lead. Yes. We are gonna lift people up. We are gonna continue developing and down the road. I can probably operate and lead at a strategic high level space. But if I don't have the team where we can just do that right now, then I can't just stay up at that top space and get frustrated when execution doesn't happen, I gotta come down and help lift people up.

Right. I gotta walk by their side. I gotta help support their execution and their development of that execution as we go. All right. That's all for now until next time.