

## When Coaching isn't Enough in Operations Management | 096

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.

[00:00:29] I was driving from Evansville to Nashville when an Ops Executive called me. He's in a regional operations role, so quite a few manufacturing plant managers report to him. Now. He knew I'm a recovering command and control manager. He's heard me speak. He's listened to some podcast episodes, and this is what he said. There's a plant manager on my team who needs to become a recovering command and control manager who's trying to who wants to become a recovering command and control manager, but just seems to be stuck in the command and control space.

This plant manager is a lot like us grew up in operations used to get it done authoritarian management style. Now technically when it comes to knowing the product and the manufacturing processes, he's solid. The problem, though, is that his technical operations and decision making skills are overrun by his gap in effective people leadership. In fact, there have been a couple of good team members, good leaders who left the organization, left the plant, and cited the plant manager's leadership as the primary factor.

Now, this ops executive who calls me, knows that he has to lead this plant plant manager through a transformation, and he has ideas. But he was also hearing some different opinions on how to handle it and wanted someone to strategize with. Now, the good news is that the company doesn't have a harsh blame culture. So they're not just saying just fire the guy and replace them.

[00:02:02] They really want to invest in the plant manager to help him transform. Because when you think about someone who has good technical skills, who has good operations, decision making skills. If we can get that person to also have great people, leadership skills and also have improvement minded skills and behaviors and habits, then we really have this winning combination.

Now, this company, though, also wants to make sure that the transformation does, in fact, happen for this leader, because while they're not just saying, hey, get rid of him, they also recognize that they would be

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doing a disservice to the rest of the team if they don't enable a change in his leadership. If they don't make something happen, then they're going to do a disservice to the rest of the team that's in that plan.

So the ops executive really appreciates this positioning from the CEO and from the HR executive and is really empowered to do something. And in fact, they have even hired an external coach that they've worked with before who knows their business to work one on one with the plant manager. So the plant manager has a resource that's and they're really investing in him. So why was the ops executive calling me then?

Well, this one question sums it up. When is coaching not enough? Now, before we go too much further, remember that when you and I talk about coaching, we're not using the word coaching the way the masses do to mean performance management, directing or feedback.

[00:03:25] If you head back to episode number 62, back from October of 2021, there's an episode called That's Not Coaching that goes into detail about why, in my opinion, those things aren't coaching and what coaching is. Instead, it's a really great episode and I encourage you to listen to that right after that in episode 64. Jamie Flinchbaugh and I talked about this topic as well, so we'll put a link to those episodes in the show notes which you can get a [processplusresults dot com](http://processplusresults.com).

Now the International Coaching Federation, ICF defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. The coaching training that I participated in when I've been developing my coaching skills has always kind of been grounded in this idea that the coachee has the answers within themselves and the coach is positioned as a partner that asks questions and listens and helps the coachee find those answers.

And it's really kind of more of a of someone who's helping you navigate as a partner. And so in this idea of like true coaching, what I believe is true coaching, the coach is not advocating for an outcome. The coach is not advocating for a behavior. The coach isn't teaching or advising or mentoring or directing or giving feedback.

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[00:04:43] The coach is not telling. In previous episodes, you've heard me talk about the five leadership interactions that exist on this continuum, from telling to asking to listening. On the telling side, you have directing when we're giving direction, I'm telling you, and then we have sharing where I'm giving you kind of advice and say, Oh, well, this is what I would do or this is what I've done in the past, or this is where what I've seen other teams do really a lot of that kind of mentoring type of work where I have more expertise and I'm sharing with you. So maybe not quite as as directing, right? But I'm still sharing. I'm still telling. And then we're teaching. I'm teaching you something you don't know. And then you start to get over into the asking section on the continuum with coaching.

Coaching really lives in this asking and listening and the far side of the continuum is listening with connecting on the very far end. So you can hear more about these interactions in episode number 14 back from November of 2020. So we'll put a link for there as well if you want to dig into that more.

But what I want you to recognize is that coaching isn't advocating right. Coaching is not telling. Coaching is different than mentoring. So if coaching isn't advocating for specific behaviors or outcomes, if coaching is directing or advising or teaching, if coaching assumes that the individual has the answers within himself, then when is coaching not enough? Remember in this scenario, there are team members being negatively impacted right now because of this plant manager's command and control style.

[00:06:16] And the executive that called me said it. I don't think I can just rely on coaching in this scenario. I think there needs to be more, some expectation, setting, some directions and feedback. But I also don't want to command and control manage the plant manager, negating any possible positive outcomes from the coaching he's getting.

When you think about it right now, coaching is a buzzword and managers are kind of being accosted for being too directive and for not doing enough coaching. And while there might be some truth to that, there also can be some harm with all of the messaging is be a coach, be a coach, be a coach. Because here's the thing. The ops executive is right. Coaching alone is not enough, definitely in this situation.

Right now, this plant manager doesn't know how to be less command and control. Let's say that be less command and control. He doesn't know what exactly he's doing that's coming across as authoritarian and

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what the alternatives are. He can't yet self assess the situation and recognize it on his own. So that's one of the things that they have to work through. And when that ops executive helps him to get to the recognition point, he won't be able to fully adjust on his own.

[00:07:26] He's going to need help doing that. He needs to be taught what the alternatives are. He needs to be demonstrated and shown and taught the behaviors. He needs expectations to be set and feedback and advice and role playing. So coaching alone is not enough in this situation. But not just in this situation. In all operations, leadership coaching alone is not enough. We need all five leadership interactions directing, sharing, teaching, coaching and connecting. We need all five leadership interactions every day.

Now, before I share more about this, I want to tell you one other story about why we're talking about this. So did you hear our last episode with Tracy O'Rourke and Katie Anderson, where we were at this like mini peer mastermind retreat together at the beach? And we really in our conversation in the podcast, we talked collaboration over competition.

You see, there's overlap in the work that the three of us do. And one of those overlaps is teaching leaders how to be a more effective coach, how to ask good coaching questions, how to, as Katie would say it, I think she's even trademarked it actually. How to break the telling habit, right? How to not just be a problem solver, but how to coach problem solving. Because the skill of problem solving is not the same as the skill of coaching, problem solving.

[00:08:44] All three of us, Katie, Tracy and I, all three of us teach these skills. And really there's a lot of overlap in how we teach these skills. I mean, the skills are the skills, right? So all three of us do this. Now, at the time I was on on the hot seat, if you will. So they were helping me and we were working on my positioning and messaging.

And one of them said, Well, this is kind of what makes you different because you go beyond the coaching skills and also support operations leaders on those difficult conversations, on accountability, on managing performance, she said sometimes in her coaching workshops, people will ask about how to coach people

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who don't want to improve or how to coach people who are having performance gaps, or how to coach people who insert whatever challenge it is. And she indicates that those are handled differently.

Those are different skills than just coaching by asking open ended questions and allowing the individual to navigate to the answers. And it was really interesting because this conversation with Katie and Tracy happened just three days after the ops executive had called me. And that helped me to see that this is a topic we need to discuss. Here's the thing. Coaching is a skill that is highly underutilized and undertrained and underdeveloped and leaders.

[00:10:03] Most operations leaders default to telling mode. It is our natural state. We have to intentionally choose to get out of telling mode. This is why it's critical that you build the coaching skills and habits for yourself and your leaders. But coaching is not a replacement for leadership. Coaching is not the only skill in leading people. Coaching is not the only skill in developing people. And coaching alone is not enough in operations management.

You also need to develop your operations leaders capabilities to give direction effectively, to give advice through sharing and mentorship, to teach behaviors and skills, to lead through conflict productively, to give feedback both reinforcing helpful behaviors and correcting unhelpful behaviors. To ask for what is needed from the team. And then to follow up on that ask and how to move between these skills in the same conversation.

Because let's be real in one conversation. In one interaction, the leader might just use more than one of these approaches. So you've got to help your leaders develop these skills and these behaviors and these habits and the routines that support them. And in addition to helping your operational leaders, the managers that are on your team to develop these skills, you then also want to help your leaders be intentional about what type of interactions they want to have, when and why. This is really what takes this leadership to the next level, because I don't just have skills that I can tap into in the moment.

[00:11:34] But now I can be intentional about it and more productive and more effective because I'm kind of choosing in advance. Right. So this is where as an operations executive, as a leader of leaders, you might put on your own coaching hat and your conversations with a manager that reports to you in your

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one on one conversations with your leaders. You can ask them about a past interaction or an upcoming interaction.

[00:11:58] You can do this in a group setting with your leadership team. What was the situation? What is the situation? What outcome did you want or do you want? What primary interaction type directing. Sharing, teaching coaching connecting. What primary interaction type did you intend to use or do you intend to use this afternoon when you talk with him? What makes you choose that leadership interaction as the primary interaction type? What actually happened or what do you expect to happen when you do that? What did you learn? What would you do in a future similar situation? What can we all learn from this? How can we learn together?

When we create a format, a structure in which to have these conversations, then we're able to do it more effectively. We've got a common language. We understand this continuum. We can discuss it as peers or as a leader and a team and a manager. And together you all can develop these capabilities. You can develop these behaviors and improve.

[00:12:57] And as your managers develop their capabilities, your next level. How do we take it to the next level as to then help them develop these capabilities in the leaders on their teams for supervisors and for team leads? Which, by the way, if you take the lead in helping them develop these skills, then they're going to have a roadmap to do it because you just did it with them.

And I know sometimes you might need help in doing it. You don't have to go it alone. So if you want help, you can of course reach out to me or you can go to my website [processplusresults.com](http://processplusresults.com) and click on Schedule a call. Happy to talk through it with you as well.

So here's your next step. Your next step is to reflect with your leadership team. How does coaching that true coaching that we talked about, how does coaching fit within a broader leadership skill set and interaction construct? What's working well and what could be better? Reflect How might you develop your leader's capabilities to intentionally and effectively interact with people on their teams using skills across this continuum, from directing to sharing to teaching to coaching to connecting. And reflect what is your best next step to purposefully develop the leaders on your team?

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[00:14:14] Before we wrap up, I want to update you. I did it. I am now based out of Evansville, Indiana, for the next year. Right now, based off the way the schedule is working, it looks like I'll be back in Colorado about every six weeks. So Colorado is still home. But for this short term consulting assignment, Indiana is kind of like home base. I'm actually in this kind of temporary home office right now.

In fact, I think there might be a bit of an echo because this room is really big and it has lots of windows. So if audio isn't on point, just bear with me on that. And if you want to actually see where I am, because I have this great view of the Ohio River straight out of this office. So if you want to see where I am and follow along, we'll put some photos at our show notes [processplusresults.com](http://processplusresults.com).

Now, I have to tell you, I am still readjusting to heat and humidity. I grew up in Georgia, so I've lived it before. But I also left Georgia like 17 years ago and I've been in Colorado for 11. So when it comes to humidity and rain and heat and bugs, let me just say this. I used to think that climate and weather, it was like some sort of superficial, silly reason to like a place. And I have totally changed my mind. I love Colorado weather and that alone is a reason to live there.

Another thing that's been interesting is that United Airlines, which is the airline I fly and have all my status end points with, stopped flying out of Evansville. So that means I am typically driving two or 3 hours to an airport. Right. It's either five different airline and take a connection or drive somewhere and get a direct flight.

So, so far I have flown in or out of Louisville, Kentucky, Nashville, Tennessee, Saint Louis, Missouri, and Indianapolis, Indiana. So four different states I've flown in or out of. Now Louisville's the easiest, so I'm hoping that I get to fly out of there more frequently. And honestly, like switching airlines to fly Delta through Atlanta or to fly American through Dallas doesn't usually make any more sense than driving since the layover and the change and all that makes it just as long as a travel day.

But I can tell you those that drive is actually getting a little old already. Now, the upside of all that driving is I now have time to listen to podcasts. I know. I've always told you I'm not a podcast listener. Huh? Starting

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to pick that up or to take a call from an ops executive wanting help on developing his leaders just like what happened on this drive to Nashville.

All right. That's it for now. We'd love to hear from you. What is your best next step to purposefully develop the leaders on your team? Until next time.