

Helping Ops Managers to Improve Thinking Capabilities | 098

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.

Hey, Jamie here. And let me tell you, I am so excited today to talk about escape rooms. I love escape rooms. Not only do I love escape rooms, my niece loves escape rooms. She's actually 11 years old and has been doing them with me and with my mom for years. Right. So she's got a few years under her belt. It doesn't matter what city we're in.

We're always checking out an escape room to do while we're. And so I wanna tell you a little bit of a story about one of the escape rooms we went to. But first quick side note, my absolute favorite [00:01:00] escape rooms across many companies across many cities are the ones at mystic escape room in downtown Littleton, Colorado.

They're great. They're super thematic. The storylines work and the puzzles are so, so good. So in our show notes, we will put a link to mystic if you're ever in the neighborhood in Littleton, Colorado, but part of what makes those escape rooms great are the puzzles, the puzzles being so good. So if you haven't done an escape room, the basic ideas that you get put into this room, and there are a series of puzzles or riles things that you have to solve.

And you have to solve a certain number of them in, or, or a certain series of them in order to escape the room at the end. And there's usually like a storyline or theme that goes with it. So. That's why I love mystic so much is just the puzzles. They just all fit so well, but I was really frustrated at one of the escape rooms that I went to.

Like, I was pretty sure I figured out the riddle and I knew the combination to [00:02:00] plug into this lock. Right? So some rooms, rooms have more locks than others. Some have lots of locks, right? Combination locks. And so you do the riddle to figure out, you know, here's the three number, the four number, the six number, whatever.

And I was pretty sure I'd figured it out. And I went to do this lock and this was a lock that I had not seen before. Like I looked at the lock and I couldn't quite figure out how it worked. Like which number was the selected one, you know how normally there's like an arrow or it fits inside an open rectangle or something like that.

And this one just didn't exactly have that. Right? Like it wasn't a hundred percent clear what I was supposed to do, how I was supposed to use this lock, but I went with what seemed the most logical.

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Given the dozen other types of locks I've seen in escape rooms and the combination didn't work. So I did what any escape room person might do, which is to try the numbers backwards, right.

Like to reverse it. And it still didn't work. So I went back to, to the clues, right? Like maybe I got the combination wrong. Maybe I didn't solve the riddle. So I went back and I went over the clues. I still got the same [00:03:00] answer. So I tried it again. doesn't work. So of course I have to ask my mom and my niece to try it.

Cuz maybe I just can't work the lock. Right? Like sometimes that's it you can't get the key to turn. You can't get the lock due, get someone else to try it. Well, they tried it, it still didn't work. So we asked for a hint, right? Can we get a hint? Hey clue masters, can we get a and the hint comes back with a clue telling us to, you know, look at a certain part of the RI.

Which we already did, but I double checked it anyways. I'm like, did I miss something? So I went back to that and I'm like, yeah, we already got that part. We already figured that out. So I come back over the Intercom again and they give me another clue about using something from earlier in the room to solve the riddle.

. Like, yeah, we did that too. That's how I got the, an like, these are the things that I did. And I even asked for them to clarify, like, how does the lock work and kind of just got like this vague answer. So this went on a couple more times and each time I'm trying to lock, my mom and niece are trying to lock.

And finally they're like, like I'm asking for like hit number five. Like I've never been stuck like [00:04:00] this on a lock. Can I ask for it? And they give us, they, they just tell us the combination, right? Like, here's the answer? well, we had it right the whole time. Yes. That's the exact answer that we have been trying.

It's the exact answer we started from. And then they explained that the lock was kind of different and gave us different instructions for how we needed to put the combination in. And boom, it opened now for any of you who know me and, you know, my patients level or my lack of patience, you can probably imagine like my frustration right now.

Like I, I don't hide my face very well. Like my emotions kind of get worn on my, on my face. I actually like physically hold my lips shut. You know, when I'm to keep me from speaking my face turns red, all the things like, so you can imagine I was not particularly happy. And I'm sure it showed, but here's the thing they could have offered me clues or the coaching version version of that asked me open ended coaching questions all day long.

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And it wouldn't have gotten me closer to solving the problem because I didn't know [00:05:00] how to work the lock. What I needed in that moment. Wasn't coaching. What I needed in that moment was teaching. Teach me how to do it. Show me how to do it. Explain to me how to do it. So here's why I'm telling you this story.

Remember, last episode, we had that general manager that was frustrated. Why didn't she just do it? why didn't the assistant manager just do it. And last week we talked about that. When your ops leaders, your supervisor managers there, aren't doing what you expect, particularly if it's a new routine or a change in routine.

And so last week we focused on the execution side, right? Understanding that a new or changed routine or behavior. Um, how do we get better execution of that leader routine or process? And so we really kind of talked about execution last week. Here's the thing though, execution alone. Isn't enough.

Practicing a bad golf swing doesn't necessarily improve your golf swing. Right? You have to intentionally work on improving that swing [00:06:00] through practice, where you're working on specific adjustments and reflection. Otherwise you're just reinforcing that same bad golf swing, right? You're just getting more reps of a bad golf.

well executing the new routine poorly. Doesn't get you the result you want when this manager explained, why didn't she just do it? Execution was only part of what he was expecting. The other part of what he was expecting was the thinking and the decision making. It was reviewing some newly available data, some visual management analyzing it, and then deciding what adjustments to make from the data and taking action on that.

So last week we worked on execution, today, we're talking about improving the thinking and the decision making behind our leader, routines behind the routines that you want, your team leads and your ops managers to be doing. So we're gonna [00:07:00] talk about four. I'm gonna give you four tips specifically about improving thinking and decision making.

And then I've got a second set of four tips to dig into one of them deeper. All right. Number one, let's talk mindset. And your approach as the senior leader first. When the general manager did his floor walk and saw the visual boards he thought, and later said to me, obviously she should have done this and that adjustment.

And what I want you to do is step number one is to remove, obviously from your thinking. Something prevented the assistant manager from doing what the general manager thought was obvious. And so of

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course, as operations leaders, we assume positive intent. We hold the mirror up and check ourselves first.

What can we do? And we say, what if it isn't obvious? Right. Let's unpack this and figure out what we could do differently to set the assistant manager up for success. So tip number one is don't assume it's obvious, just because it's obvious for [00:08:00] you. Doesn't mean it's obvious for the managers that are on your team.

All right. Tip number two is to teach. You need to teach the mechanics of the routine. You pull this data, you move this card, you ask this question, right? So teach the actual mechanics of the routine and also teach the thinking process. Go back to my escape room experience, waiting around for me to figure it out on my own.

Is it a helpful strategy? Not only are we not getting us where we wanna go, but I'm not learning anything either. That's what happens when someone jumps in to provide coaching before they've done any teaching. And by the way, it's especially bad when you wanna throw in accountability without doing any teaching.

Right. so there are times when it is absolutely appropriate to sit back, ask open-ended non-leading non-judgmental good coaching questions and let the leader [00:09:00] figure it out on their own. We don't do enough of this in general. So in general, we need to do more of it. But you also have to have discernment of when and as an ops executive, you need to make sure you develop the ops manager's capabilities in discerning.

When do they need to do or to direct, when do they need to advise or share? When do they need to teach? When do they need to, to coach? And when do they need to focus more on kind of connecting in the relationship? So when there is a new or changed routine, whether it's an existing routine that is new to that person, maybe they're new enrolled.

So it's new to them. Or it's someone maybe who's been in position, but now we're asking them to think or to work differently. Then you wanna gut check whether your ops manager has effectively taught their leader. Right? Has the ops manager effectively taught the supervisor or the team lead or the person that is taking on this leader?[00:10:00]

So at the end, after I talk through all four of these, these tips, I'm gonna share with you four tips for teaching thinking skills. So stay tuned for that. But right now we're just kind of talking about how do we

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improve thinking and decision making. Number one, don't assume it's obvious. Number two, teach the mechanics and the thinking number three, walk by their side.

Remember, this one was last week, too. Last, last week's focus was on supporting the execution of the routine. When you walk by your, by their side, you're also observing and teaching and coaching the thinking process. That's right. You're gonna interact across the whole continuum of telling, asking and listening as you walk by their side.

So here's an example, a new planning and visual management routine that I was supporting for a client and it had been taught and it was the first day the team lead was going to do the. So, of course I was there. Right. As you would want your ops managers to be there walking by their side. [00:11:00] Now there were some simple math in the routine and some actions, right?

It's like here's four or five steps and here's some math and the leader was getting hung up. The team lead was getting hung up a little bit. Like he'd do the math and he'd get one, but then he'd forget one. And the first couple of times I showed him what was wrong. Right. So this is like the lock, right?

He's he's, he's doing a lock he hasn't seen before. So if I just like, let him figure it out on his own, that's not very helpful. So I'm gonna show him, I'm gonna show him where he got it wrong. Cool. He's got that now. And then I gave him some space. So then the next couple that he got wrong, he could realize and learn himself what he did wrong and then correct.

Right. So the first couple of times was like, oh, this is the first time he's seen this lock. Let me actually provide some helpful support. Oh, he's seen this lock a couple of times now, now he's ready to figure it out on his own. Right. So we get to this point where he, he knows how to do it now. And he has this [00:12:00] visual aid to support him, but he just needed more reps to get it down because he didn't always get it right the first time.

So you just need more, uh, this practice to learn. And then of course, support to be by his side. And then while he's still in the process of doing this first routine, he was called away to support a team member in the line, you know, like happens all the time. Right. So I waited for him to finish and to come back.

Right. So he finished that. He came back and he started back up and guess what? He struggled on the first couple, because you know, that time, just that five minutes. That had passed was enough for his brain to kind of forget what was happening, but he was able to figure it out. He was able to look, see where he got, got it wrong.

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Look at the visual aid to, to do that. And it was, you know, he was starting to learn again. Right. He's getting a little bit faster. And then he got called away again. This time, it was a bigger machine problem that was gonna take longer than five minutes. Now, you know, my command and control directing, jump in and take over self.

Really wanted to [00:13:00] just finish it for him. I mean, this is a five minute activity once he gets the hang of it. And we're over here going on 20, 25 minutes, like time is ticking. I really just wanna finish it and help him. Air quotes there. I just wanna help him out. I just wanna give him a hand, but I knew I couldn't do it.

Not this time, maybe down the road, I can support him in that, but right now he needs the repetition of learning it. And of executing the routine all the way through, but I didn't abandon him. Remember this tip is to walk by his side. So I stuck it out with him that way I can make sure he didn't get sidetracked and forget to do the routine right after all it's the first day.

And it would be very easy for him to just get sidetracked. Things just happen and oops, I didn't get to it. So I stuck it out with him and he went back and then he got all the way through it. And the next time it went faster. And the time after that, it went faster and he was able to develop his skill in doing that routine.[00:14:00]

Now I had to kick my natural command and control to the curb, to walk by his side in support of what he needed in that moment, side note, there was a time like a week or so later where something similar happened and I did offer to finish the last part for him because in that moment he didn't need teaching and coaching.

So I can walk by his side and give him what will best serve him, not just for right now, but for the future as well. And in this case, as I was walking by his side at first, it was teaching, right. It was showing him the lock, the new lock he had never seen. And then it was sit, sitting back, standing by his side while he did it and letting him figure it out.

And then as he got distracted, it was waiting for him, but him knowing he was gonna come back to me and he had someone waiting. And then when the second distraction happened, it was, he was walking by his side, sticking it out with him and being able to bring him back so that he could complete the routine in full.

right. By the way. Another thing that was great about my walking by his side [00:15:00] is that I got to see firsthand what the obstacles were that went, might make the routine difficult. So I could ask him about that

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he could work to overcome the obstacles, or we could work on it together, or maybe we needed to adjust the timing of the routine itself.

All great learning. That wouldn't happen. If I left him on his own, if I just stuck him in a RO in a room and said here, figure it out on your own. Oh. And every now and then you can call me over the Intercom and I'll give you some clues that aren't really all that helpful. Okay. So. Number three is to walk by their side so that you can support them.

Right? Number one, don't assume it's obvious. Number two, teach the thinking number three, walk by their side for support and number four, build in reflection. Yay. We're finally able to do actual coaching, asking these open ended non-leading non-judgmental questions. reflection is a difficult part of a routine for people to prioritize.

So you wanna help them with that by being there and ask them questions. Right. And it can be, uh, the next day when they're doing their [00:16:00] planning, that you can ask the reflection questions. It can be at the end of the day. It can be whenever it is, that works right based off your scenario, but you wanna be able to.

Ask questions that help them to reflect and to make, keep it simple. My recommendation is just take a lesson out of the COTA playbook, right? So here's examples of how you can build in reflections for your ops leaders. It's like, right. In this example, we're working on this new planning routine routines.

So it might be, Hey, what did you plan for yesterday? What did you expect to happen? What actually happened? What did you learn? And from what you've learned, what will you do for today's plan? Right. Or what do you plan for today? What will you do for tomorrow's plan? Right. So you want to build in some sort of reflection and help them get that reflection in and help them learn.

And this is where you can coach. So if you're getting some coach training on coaching, now, here we go. We got to use it. All right. So number one, don't assume it's obvious. Number two, teach the [00:17:00] thinking number three, walk by their team by their side to support and number four, build in reflect. Now I told you I would come back to number two, teach the thinking, right?

Like how do you teach thinking? I mean, it's not like it's a widget, it's not the exact same set of circumstances over and over. I mean, come on. Every decision is situational. It's custom. It's custom heard anything like that before? Well, I wanna give you four tips that, um, I think can help you teach thinking and teach decision making.

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So, number one is to explain your thinking visually and verbally. That's right. Get your thinking out of your head. Make it visual with post-its or whiteboards or models or drawings, right. Make it visual and make it auditory. Explain your thinking in words, right. Verbally say it. When I was teaching this new planning process, you know, I made a worksheet for the plan [00:18:00] and it was super simple.

Like there was nothing. Fancy about this worksheet. And realistically it may not even be something that you have to have forever, but it's visual, there's boxes for each assignment. There's specific steps and you can see what's happening and they hand write their plan in it. So I took one of these worksheets and I created the, my first plan for the day.

Right. As an, as a, as an example. And I made copies of it. And then I explained. What I planned and why for everything that was on that plan, I walked through every step. And then I said, okay. And I handed out new copies of the adjustment plan. So it was what I started with, but now there were adjustments changes I made based off of unplanned absences or machine changes or whatever else it might have been.

And we walked through and explained why I made each adjustment. And then I gave them a new sheet of copies of the plan at the end of the shift where it had actuals. And I explained each [00:19:00] new marking on, on each copy so they could see it visually and hear it from an auditory, a verbal standpoint. Right. So I often use post-it notes to get my thinking visual.

The COO, one of my client organizations chuckled at me recently when, of course I pulled out the post-it notes. He's like, I don't know what consultants would do without post-its, but the reality is it really helps me to see it. And it helps me to create an environment where other people can see it too.

And the other thing I've found is that by making it visual, and making it auditory by, by explaining it both visually and verbally, it often will clarify my thinking because what happens a lot of times is I think, I don't know. It just like, you know, a bunch of swirling happens inside of my head and then it comes out like this and I don't know what's going on.

And so when I, it forces me to, when I make it visual and I explain it both visually [00:20:00] and verbally. That it forces me to get it out of a blob and into something that makes sense. So, as an ops executive, get the thinking out of your head, explain it verbally and visually. And make sure you develop your ops managers to do the same and that they develop their ops leaders to their ops, you know, leaders or supervisors or team leads to do the same.

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Right. Let's make this part of how we teach. All right. Number one is to explain your thinking visually and verbally. Number two, tip number two is to connect cause and effect. As you're explaining the thinking verbally or drawing the thinking visually, I want you to connect causes and effects visually.

You might use arrows or lines verbally. You're gonna say things like, because I think therefore, right, because I see this data, I think that this is happening. [00:21:00] Therefore I'm making this decision. Right. I observe this behavior. I think that the effect of this behavior will be this. Therefore, I'm making this decision now, listen, I'm not trying to give you a script to follow, but I want you to connect causes and effects together.

As you're explaining your thinking, why are you doing this? What is the cause and effect thinking that's going through your brain right now. Connecting cause and effect is a foundational skill that can pay wonders across all kinds of things, improvement and problem solving and decision making and thinking.

And we wanna get better at connecting cause and effect. So I wanna make sure that as you explain your connecting cause and effect now tip number. Speak in terms of scientific thinking, right? So creating cause and effect or connecting cause, and effect is part of this, but also you're making a hypothesis or a [00:22:00] prediction when you make a decision, right?

like the you're making a decision because you expect something to happen from that decision. So if we carry that last segment forward, I see this input. I think this input will cause that effect, therefore I'm making this decision. What I expect to happen from this decision is this right? My hypothesis is that doing this action will cause that effect my prediction is that by making this decision by acting on this decision, then that will happen.

So as you're explaining your thinking or your decision making, you wanna share what your hypothesis or prediction is, what do you expect to happen as a result that really gets to the heart of why you're making the decision. It creates an opportunity to talk through the inputs versus the outputs, the causes versus the effects, the assumptions versus the facts.

And it will help strengthen the scientific thinking among your operations leaders. [00:23:00] And tip number four, follow up on the predictions you explain when you explain a prediction or a hypothesis follow up on the next hour or the next day or the next week, whatever the right timeframe is, but follow up with the manager you're teaching and compare that to what actually happens.

Do a reflection together model. What it's like to reflect on that decision and learn from it. Don't just scatter teach whatever's on your mind at, or whatever happens to come. Like, yes, you can teach those things as

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they come up, but be sure to follow up on the last thing you are teaching, see it all the way through, carry it through.

So the learner can see the effect of the thinking or the decision making. So you can teach through your reflection next time you can ask them to do some reflection and make sure that we're not just like, oh, we made a decision and boom, we never talk about that decision again. Like, was it a good decision?

Did it work? Did, did what we think happened actually happen? Like what's the. So see it through, right. See the teaching through. All [00:24:00] right. Today we shared a lot. Whew. A lot. We shared two sets of four tips to help you develop the thinking and decision making capabilities of leader routines, or behind leader routines, I guess.

So something that your ops manager maybe hasn't done before, or you're making a change to routine, or they've got, they, you know, some basics of the skill, but you'd like to see that skill developed further. . So when you have an ops leader or when you are trying to get your ops manager to be able to do this for their leaders, these are two sets of four tips.

The first are four tips to help improve the thinking and decision making behind our leader routines, which are number one, don't assume it's obvious. Number two, teach both unique mechanics of the routine and the thinking or decision making behind the routine. Number three, walk by their side to support them as they learn and number four, build in reflection.

And then we shared four tips to help [00:25:00] you teach thinking, and decision making. Ready. Number one, explain your thinking visually and verbally. Get it out of your head. Number two, connect cause and effect in your explanations. Number three speak in terms of scientific thinking, your hypotheses and your predictions and number four, follow through on the predictions you explain, take 'em through and see what happens.

All right. That's it for today until next time.

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