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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.

[00:00:29] Hi ops executives and leaders Jamie V. Parker here and we are continuing our conversation from the last episode on the enemies to effective execution. Now, last episode we talked about distraction as this enemy as one of the enemies to effective execution. Right? We get distracted from the important strategic priority by all of the things of running the business. And I shared two of the tips that have helped me prevent this distraction.

The first is to separate the strategic priority and the run the business, just to separate it in your mind and treat the actions for those differently. Now, I talked about my work with an accountability coach and how at first I would make my top activities for the week with the activities for the strategic priority, all in one big blob with the activities to run the business.

And so because of that, they would get lost behind things like client delivery and urgent compliance tasks. But when I separated them out and listed like here are the three things I need to do this week to move this one strategic priority forward. I still did the 72 things I needed to do to run the business, and I also would focus on the three strategic priority actions.

So that was the first thing. And the second thing that I said that I recommended, just something that helps me is to create routines or to create a cadence of activities that are specifically designed to support the strategic priority.

[00:01:54] So whether that's a cadence of meetings or a cadence of work, work time, something that can help support that so that you're not trying to do that ad hoc, you're not trying to squeeze it into the calendar. Instead, you are creating the avenues and demonstrating the priority on your calendar, right? So that's the last episode. If you missed it, you can head over and listen to it.

Remember, you can always go back to processplusresults.com/podcast to find the show notes and the episode. Now, before I talk about another enemy of effective execution, I want to continue this

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conversation about what sometimes happens for me when I take those two steps, those two steps that I just kind of quickly reviewed.

So sometimes using the example I just shared, I am not able to do the three strategic priority actions and all 70 to run the business actions. It's still a success though, because by separating them I now have visibility into the decisions so that I can purposely make them and it helps to make that visible. And it can also raise problems that you can now choose to solve if you decide that that's worth solving.

So I know that sometimes, like, well, like I can't do more. Well, you may not do more. There may be a trade off. And the reality is that trade off, the decisions about what's happening versus what's not that trade off is still happening when you're distracted, right? You're still only doing the 72 things and not doing the three things.

[00:03:23] It's just that you're neglecting those three things. You're neglecting the important strategic priority without it necessarily being a purposeful choice. You just ran out of time and whatever was left was left. So by now you have this priority in your face. It's visible, right? You've separated it, so it's not caught in a blob.

And now you get to choose. And that makes it harder to ignore and harder to neglect. You may still choose that, but at least now you know you're choosing it. It's a conscious, conscious choice, right? So you might have to instead, if you don't want to neglect it, you might have to let something off of your 70 to run the business list, right? Like something that's that.

The 72 things you need to do to run the business, you might have to let 1 or 2 of those go. Or you might have to solve the problem of how to get it done also. So I've recently had experience with this personally, like me personally with on an internal project for my work. And so I have this activity that's it's one of the 72, right? It's one of the 72. And I wanted to get it done, but I didn't want to get it done at the expense of the strategic priority, right? Like if I have to choose between number 72 and the strategic priority, I'm choosing the strategic priority.

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[00:04:38] But my preference would be to get it done. Also. Right now, what happened in this scenario is I ultimately had to choose to let it go and then have someone on my team do an alternative instead. Now, I'm glad I did it because I'm glad I didn't do 72 instead of the strategic priority. But I don't love the alternative, right like this. You know, the choice that we ended up having to go with alternative.

It's not my best work, highest self, exactly where I'd want to be with it. Right. But surprise, it happened again. Right. And in fact, in a matter of a few months, it happened three different times. So now I have this problem. This has raised a problem that I need to solve in one way of solving it is to stop the activity altogether. That is one option that is on the table. Now, I don't want I don't know if I want to do that.

You know, I haven't decided that I want to do that. But it's it's there as an. Another option is that I can now do structured problem solving to define the problem, understand the current state and solve the problem so that I can do both, so that I can do my strategic priority and do this. Number 72. Right. And I'm bringing all this up because I want us to be real together.

[00:05:46] And what we talked about on the last episode is not going to magically fix bandwidth and execution obstacles, right? You're not going to say, Oh, well, I separated it out, so now I have this, so now I can focus. I'm not it's not getting lost in distraction. And maybe I created some routines, so maybe it's an hour a week. I now have an hour a week dedicated to this strategic priority or I have 20 minutes every day or whatever it might be. Right?

So I've created this cadence, so I have some time. But we also know that like it's not just going to magically fix everything. You still have the 72 things, right? And so I wanted to be real. I didn't want to gloss over that and act like, well, it's no big deal, right? Oh, well, just figure it out.

What this will help you do, though, is it is going to help you focus less and it will help make problems more visible and clear so that you can be more purposeful in your decisions and you can have more awareness and you can make decisions consciously rather than just letting time run out and whatever you got to you got to what you did and you did. So this is going to help. And it will also help to create make problems more visible, not to create the problems, but to make the problems that are already there more visible.

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[00:06:54] All right. So I just want to share that. Let's be real. You're still going to have problems, but now you can see the problems and you can be more purposeful about the choices you make. All right. So with that follow up done, I want to continue to talk about enemies to effective execution. And one enemy to effective execution is distraction. That's what we just talked about. That's what we talked about on the last episode.

Another enemy to effective execution is complexity. Yes, this is a repeated challenge I've observed in the last six months with clients, colleagues, friends, and sometimes with myself, too. All right. So let's say that you have defined your strategic priority. We're going to use a quality example I mentioned in the last episode your quality performance is having a ripple effect. Not only are customers getting bad quality, but it's multiplying defects due to interrupted whip work in progress. The rework is killing your productivity.

You can't get flow going. Maybe internal sales teams, external customers are losing confidence that you can deliver, which of course results in buffered lead time requests, creating more pressure that then amplifies the performance gaps. It's a vicious cycle, but I've been there before. All right. So yes, you need to improve on quite a few things, right? You want to work on your productivity and you want to work on your workflow and you want to have standard work and you want to have improvement, blah, blah, blah.

[00:08:11] Right? But you have now identified that quality quality is the strategic priority. This is the key that opens the opportunity on everything else. You have to stabilize this now down the road. I don't know if it's going to be one month or three months or six months down the road. You get this quality stabilized, You get things working.

You can change the strategic priority and you can kind of switch to the focus to have focus on something else while you just maintain the quality. But right now, got to work on the quality, right? So you know this, you know that quality is your strategic priority and you are going to keep a focus on quality and not allow the other things to distract you from taking forward action on quality every day. Awesome.

So it's time to take action and the specific action isn't relevant. Like I'm not actually trying to solve this quality problem with you on this podcast, right? Maybe you're tracking data to learn more. Maybe you're sharing direct communication in tiered meetings. Maybe you're doing structured problem solving every

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day toward your defect top defect type.

Maybe you're creating good and bad samples and standard work documentation to retrain team members, right? Like the what isn't important and like getting to this root cause. Like, I'm not talking about this from a problem solving perspective.

[00:09:21] What I've observed and the reason I'm bringing this up is what I've observed is I've observed ops managers who have struggled with effective execution. And one of those reasons is complexity in whatever action example above, right? Like whatever we just talked about, pick one, right?

So they build complexity into the activity. Complexity makes it hard for people to follow through. When I've observed ops managers who have struggled with effective execution, one of the reasons is complexity in whatever action example from above, right? Like pick one. They build complexity into the activity, and complexity makes it hard for people to follow through.

If you want people to do something, whether that's you yourself, you want yourself to do something or you want your team to do something right. Like if you collectively as a team, we all want to do something, then make it simple. Don't include unnecessary steps or non-critical information.

Make things accessible and simple. I worked with an ops manager once who was working with a quality issue, you know, kind of like the one that we use in this example. And one of the obstacles identified very early on is that they didn't really know what the quality problems were like. We're having tons of defects and like we have it at a super high level. We actually don't really understand the current state, and the manager and the assistant manager identified this as a critical step.

[00:10:46] They needed to take that week. Like this week when I say, what's the one thing or the three things or whatever that you need to do, What's the one next step for this strategic priority? And so this manager put together this defect tracking system so they could start to capture this data and learn and identify and define the problem. All of that, right. But it was complex.

You see the manager in their mind, they wanted to use the data to do lots of things. They wanted to learn

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the most frequent type of defects, the product type that had the most defects, what process steps had the defects? What machines were having defects? What team member had the most frequent defects and what type and what type were they? Right. What the trend was.

Are we improving versus declining? You know, probably more I don't remember all the details, but what I'm trying to show you is that all of this, like what he what he wanted this to do, resulted in complex data collection, complex data tracking and complex data reporting. We made it hard for people at every step of the way. So they've identified this. This is a step. We got to learn this. We don't know. We don't know the problem well enough to even know where to start. And so we've got to we've got to understand this current state and we need to go and and learn this information, learn this data.

[00:12:00] Well, it took more than two weeks for the manager to create the tracking sheets for the team to use and for this to create the spreadsheet for the assistant manager to record the date in like every couple of days, check in. Hey, you know, we started recording this data. We started collecting data. What have we learned so far? Oh, we're still working on this, right? We're still still working on this. You know, I've got to make a few more tweaks.

Like, this is the strategic priority, the critical challenge. And we lost this two weeks plus worth of time, two weeks worth of information, two weeks worth of learning. And at that point in time, the manager didn't need to know all of that. It didn't need that that system to do all of those things. So what ended up happening is about midway through the third week, someone else on the team stepped in and created a simple manual hash mark tracking system like hash mark. Hash mark hash mark.

It was super simple for the team to use. They started learning quickly and from there they could start to understand the problem, narrow the problem and start going after something tactically, right? Like, here's what we're going after. Complexity is an enemy to action and therefore an enemy to execution. Complexity prevents people from taking consistent action. And on the flip side, simplicity encourages action and execution.

[00:13:20] I want to give you a simplicity example that I am fascinated by. I'm supporting one of my clients on a new product kind of startup type of thing. And process and systems aren't in place, right? Because

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they're learning how to make this product and this, you know, they have processes and systems for different products in different plants, but this is a different product.

It's produced differently. And what it means is that the team that's involved, they are doing lots of processes, right? They are defining tons of them. They're learning, right. So every week they're either experimenting or learning through customer orders. They're refining, they're documenting just process, new process, new process, new process. And it's not just like the processes from like a flow step one, two, three, but the artifacts, the checklist, the forms, the Kanban cards, the process check sheets, like all the artifacts. And some things don't take very well. Right?

Let's be real. Some things don't take very well. Maybe they get started and then they fall off. I've watched, you know, it's like, okay, this is hard to do something about. This is complex and difficult to use. What is it? And I'm trying to watch to see that where just some of this stuff, execution doesn't stick. Now, there is one process that I have watched that from day four has worked consistently across people for months. And it's fascinating to me. And the process itself is not.

[00:14:44] I'm going to walk you through it a little bit, not because the process is important, but just to to get a gauge of what I'm talking about here. You know, and this is a simple, super simple parts replenishment process for small parts. And the team already had this to bin Kanban system, right?

In other plants where all the team members used to work, there was a water spider replenishment system so they didn't have to used to think about it. They just used the two part system, two bin system that was already in place. So when they moved this operation from the corner of one building into its own separate building, the two bin Kanban came over, but there wasn't a water spider system, right. Or a team to support it. None of that existed anymore. So the part of the process came over, the artifacts came over, but like the rest of the process, didn't come over. So what do you think happened?

Well, one of the small parts ran out. Both bins were empty, production got shut down. The parts had to be ordered, had to wait for the parts. You know, it was only a day. But, you know, you see what I'm talking about, right? Like, okay, cool. So this led to the the leaders using their eight step problem solving and

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really identified that they had a need to do this larger inventory control and replenishment system, like, oh, this is a different building, this is a different product like we have.

[00:15:54] We have to do this not just on this one little thing. We've got to do this across the whole thing, but that's a bigger project, right? And that's going to take more time. And they didn't want to run the risk of running out of parts again before that whole system could be developed and implemented and all that. Right. So they put together this simple temporary solution and it involved a flip chart, right?

There's a flip chart on the wall with some columns and rows, you know, handwritten, you know, with a marker. Right. A small little staging area. And I mean, I'm small, like 12 by 12, 12in by 12in kind of thing for ordered and not yet ordered bins. And they're labeled. Right. They have little labels that says ordered and labeled it says not yet ordered. And when I say labels, I mean it's masking tape with words handwritten on it. Right.

And there's a very there's standard work was written. So standard work with here's step one, two, three, four. And it's simple. It's very simple and it's visual. And day one, we taught it. We had our first empty bin go through the process. We didn't have another well, I don't think we had another empty bin. We may have, but on day four, I did a walk through, we did a walk through and we saw that the process was broken.

[00:17:01] And so we retaught the team, the process and clarified a misunderstanding. And it has worked consistently for months since then. In fact, the other day the flip chart page was filled like the last row was used and the manufacturing team brought it in and he was looking for another flip chart page so that he could make a new sheet. So not only was it working, but this frontline team member was able to keep it going when this artifact was like now complete and we need another.

Every time I walk by that and I see the process executed exactly as it was first documented on the standard worksheet, like I smile, I shake my head and I say out loud, I am so fascinated because I don't know if I've ever seen something work that smoothly, that quickly, that consistently and sustained, right. Like so simply sustained. It doesn't take any effort or energy to sustain it. It's crazy. It's wild.

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Now, I'm sure there are several contributing factors, but one of these is definitely that it is simple. It is simple for the team to do. It is simple for the manufacturing team who's using it. It's simple For the management team who orders and does the replenishment like it is simple. Bottom line, complexity is an enemy to effective execution. I want you to create more awareness for yourself as you continue to execute on your strategic priority.

[00:18:24] Ask yourself if you're adding complexity or if you're creating simplicity. Ask other people what they see. Make sure that you're not falling into the complexity trap. I know that I can fall into this trap myself, and I usually don't see it when I'm like on the fall down. It's usually only after I've fallen, right? Like I'm down at the bottom of the pit or it's after the execution fails and someone kind of points out to me, Well, I was going to come back. Why did you make it so hard?

I want you to really take a look at complexity and ask yourself and evaluate for yourself. How does complexity fit into this execution gap? It might not be. The issue on any one particular execution gap, but it does sometimes happen. So that awareness is going to be great for you and be interested in hearing if you realize that complexity is the culprit for any of your execution gaps.

All right. So you can find all of our podcasts and show notes in this series on execution at our website processplusresults.com/podcast. If you haven't already, head back and listen to episode 114. We covered the first enemy to effective execution distraction. And today we talked about the second enemy to effective execution complexity. You can join us on our continued conversation in our next episode. So stay tuned and we'll see you then.