

Lean Culture Requires Productive Conflict (REPLAY) | 118

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.

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Productive conflict.

If you could have less destructive conflict and more productive conflict, then what would be the impact for your organization? And when I say destructive conflict, it's not just the big blowouts or arguments or drama that initially comes to mind. Destructive behavior and conflict also includes things like withdrawing or ignoring or avoiding having a needed conversation because, you know, it might be uncomfortable.

In fact, I recently facilitated a session for the Ohio State University's Center for Operational Excellence. I think there were more than 40 questions posed in the Q&A. It actually maxed out and shut down the Q&A box on the system. So it was more than we could answer in the session. And I went through them afterwards to create a follow up video for them. (I'll even put the link to that video in the show notes for you if you want to watch it.)

But here's the thing. By far, most of the questions were about how to handle situations that were a bit uncomfortable, particularly those interpersonal situations. Which makes sense, right?

Because leadership is a relationship. It's about how we interact with other people.

So these uncomfortable situations, you know, things like when you and another leader are both involved with the same group but have different styles of how you approach people. When your boss isn't or doesn't fill in the blank, whatever it is for you. When you have a team member who's worked 30 years and they're nearing retirement, and you know what, she just doesn't really want to change. When you want to address a situation with a colleague, but the last time you did, they got really angry and didn't talk to you for two weeks.

Conflict differences. Uncomfortable conversations.

Well, guess what?

You know, those thought models we talked about in episodes 41, 42 and 43? Well, they're coming back into play.

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I had a lot of my own strategies and tactics and skills that I've built and have mentored and developed in leaders over my career, but this topic of conflict was so common that I really wanted to do some additional study on it. And I did several things to help improve my skills and my knowledge in the area.

One of the things I did was become certified as an authorized partner with Everything DiSC. So I can facilitate the profile debriefs and the trainings and the classes for DiSC Workplace, DiSC Management, and also for the Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team that was built in partnership with Patrick Lencioni.

But one of the things I was really excited about also when I went this path is the DiSC for Productive conflict that really focuses on our natural tendencies in conflict and helping us be more deliberate in choosing productive responses.

Now, when I went through my training, guess what I discovered? Through all the research that went into this method, the conflict response path, was this:

Number one, the conflict happens. That's the situation. The thing in the Crucial Confrontations model we talked about before, it's the See and Hear step. In the self-coaching thought model that we talked about before, it's the circumstance. So then in this model, you're going to have an automatic thought. Sound familiar?

Then, left unchecked, that thought leads to your response, which may be a destructive response, like yelling or like avoiding. Now in the Productive Conflict response path, in order to choose a productive response, you have to catch yourself at that thought place, step back and reframe, because this then allows you to choose a productive response.

Yep, that's right. The conflict response path outlined in everything DiSC for Productive conflict is pretty similar to what we've already talked about with the Crucial Confrontations stories and the Life Coach School CTFAR Self-Coaching Thought Model.

Now, in this model, I think the automatic thought could be just that, or it could be a story like the whole "late to dinner video game playing story" I worked up in my head. I told you about this in Episode 41, I think it was. Go back and listen to this one. So I worked up a whole story in my head. So it wasn't just the automatic thought. It was also like the big story that I was framing.

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Now, also from that thought between the place where there's a thought and there's a response, there is a feeling. And I want us to acknowledge that. Our actions are more closely associated with our feeling state than with our thinking state. So learning to recognize and name our emotions and then building the skill to feel our emotions without an uncontrollable or automatic reaction, that then allows us to choose our response.

It's amazing how often a conflict situation can be resolved just by changing the actions of one of the people involved. Think about two people in a conflict. You don't always have to change both. Sometimes just changing one person's behaviors can make a big difference and turn that conflict from destructive to productive.

Maggie Reyes is a marriage life coach. I'm not married, but I actually follow her work. And, you know, I don't listen to all of her podcasts. I listen to some of them. I follow some of her work. And the basis of her work is that she really just works with one person, typically the woman, in the marriage. So unlike couples counseling where, you know, both people are kind of going into the counseling together, she empowers one person to impact the relationship through these types of self-awareness and self-management coaching techniques, including that CTFAR, Self-Coaching Thought Model from the Life Coach School that we've talked about before.

So and so this is why I follow her, because when you think about it, again, leadership is a relationship. It's interpersonal interactions, how we interact with others. And so it's often really not unlike this.

And as a leader, it's your responsibility to change first. As a leader, it is your responsibility to change first. All right, bottom line, self-awareness and self-management are very important for leaders.

Now, if you listen to episodes 41, 42 and 43, and you weren't quite sure, like, I don't know how this feels, a little fluffy, all this life coaching stuff. Well, hopefully this really helps to bring it to an application point, because so often organizations practice Lean and jump into tools and tactics and systems and they jump into conversations and cell layouts and 5S and Kaizen events.

When you think about it, though, when you think about it, you're asking people to change the way they are thinking and the way they're working. And let's be real. You might have misstepped the first few times and forgot to ask and just went in and did it for them or did it to them- because I know I've made the mistake.

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The mistake organizations make is they spend all of this time trying to change the way the front line, the people on the floor, the way THEY do the work, the way THEY make the product or deliver the service, and they forget to develop the leaders' abilities to build relationships and to inspire people by changing the way they tell, ask and listen. Changing the way they direct, share, teach, coach and connect.

And then they're surprised when they hit resistance that leaders don't know how to respond to. And Ops Managers are stuck holding the bag because the folks on the front line are pushing back to them and the executive leadership are pushing down to them. And now they're stuck in the middle.

The thing is, productive conversations and conflict matter. Your abilities as a leader to have meaningful and productive conversations when we disagree is critical, especially if you're trying to create a culture where people proactively and collaboratively raise and solve problems to continuously improve.

Believe it or not, in most organizational situations, two reasonable adults can come to different conclusions or have different perspectives, and we want both to be able to express their conclusions and be able to truly hear the other. It's one way that we learn, and it requires productive conversations and conflict.

If you want to build a Lean culture, if you want to continuously improve, you have to develop your leaders' abilities to build relationships and to foster productive conflict.

So here's what I did. I took the different pieces of the models, plus everything I've learned through 15 years of multi-unit operations management, and I built a curriculum around productive conversations and conflict.

We go through our own self-awareness and self-management. We work on our beliefs and thoughts. We incorporate what we learned from our DiSC for Productive Conflict profiles.

But we also work on our behaviors, our skills. How do we avoid inflammatory language and instead use inviting language? What about those nonverbal cues? What are the four levels of conflict? And how can understanding the levels help us address problems more effectively? We're building our skills so that we can de-escalate situations. Building our capabilities, so that we have the confidence and the competence to have difficult conversations that we've been avoiding.

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And we also look at systems. The repeatable processes, the routines that we can put into place to create an environment where the hard conversations happen, whether that's your own individual routines as a leader or some specific routines we can put into place in, say, cross-functional meetings or in your tier one meetings or you're in your gemba walks.

All of this is in alignment with respect for people as a foundational belief system and continuous improvement tools and tactics that you may practice or you may use in your Lean continuous improvement efforts.

Now, the great news for you is that productive conversations and conflict start with self.

So here's your next step. Start with self awareness, go to the shownotes for the episode. This is episode 45 at <https://processplusresults.com/podcast/> and download the Conflict Response Worksheet you see in the mentions and feature section.

Pay attention to yourself. Notice your own responses. This is not where you're going and judging other people. This is for you, self-awareness. And identify the three to five destructive responses that you tend to default to.

Now that you've identified what your natural tendencies are, that becomes your cue to pay attention to yourself. Every time you sense yourself falling into one of those automatic responses, you can choose to reflect and explore what's happening for you in that moment.

Hey, are you an A-type? Want bonus points?

Bonus: talk about what you've learned with your leader and with your team and give them a chance to share their perspective?

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And what about you, you want more? Well, if you're interested in taking the DiSC for Productive Conflict assessment, reach out to me. I will get you all set up.

And if you want help developing your leaders capabilities to have better, more productive conversation and conflict, then schedule a call.

Just head to <https://processplusresults.com/contact-us/> and then click on the "Schedule a Call" button.

Until next time.