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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.

[00:00:28] Hey, ops executives and leaders. Today, let's spend some time talking about delegation. Let me start by asking you a question. Thinking in terms of Goldilocks, too much, too little or just right. When it comes to the frequency and the amount of delegation you do, don't worry too much about the effectiveness right now.

But just when it comes to the amount of delegation, do you think that you delegate too much, too often or too little, not enough or just the right amount? What would you say? Too much or too often not enough or just the right amount? I'm working with a client on leadership development this year, long journey we're taking together, and it's not a full service engagement.

So they're doing most of the heavy lifting, but I'm helping to organize their needs into a path and to facilitate some activities and dialogs. And one of the things we've been talking about is delegation, particularly within the context of development and strategic priorities.

One of the things that this organization see happen, what's happening with them is that they're seeing that leaders get stuck working in the weeds, making decisions and troubleshooting in areas that they'd like to develop their next level of leaders to own. And if they do that, that is going to allow leaders to spend time on strategic priorities and moving the business forward and not just day to day management or week to week management. The other thing that this organization is that they're growing.

[00:02:04] So of course, we always need to work on developing our next leaders. But when you're growing, that's even more critical and more urgent. So we're working with 24 of their executive senior and kind of like mid-level leaders. So we're on a call kicking off this section on delegation and development.

And I asked them the question that I asked you Do you delegate too much, not enough or just the right amount? So here are the results. No. One zero out of 24. No one said they delegate too much or too frequently. Zero three people said they think they delegate just the right amount and everyone else said

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not enough. So what do you think about that? Is that what you would expect if you asked your teams of leaders the same question? It definitely tracks for what I see and what I hear when I work with clients or when I go out and keynote conferences or organizational leadership summits.

And so I don't think that this organization's experience is unique. I think this is actually a very common experience. And because of that, I want to dig in a little bit deeper and ask why. If 21 out of 24 operations leaders in a room say that they think that they don't delegate as much as they should, why is that?

How would you respond? How would you answer that question of why? How do you think your team would respond? What is what is our current state around this, around why we don't delegate enough? So what I'm going to do is I've taken all of the things that I have seen and heard, and I've created three main buckets, right? So I've taken all the things.

[00:03:38] I've created three main buckets. I have a few other reasons at the end that I'll share that are kind of the miscellaneous things that I hear a little bit. But the ones that I heard repeatedly, those are the ones that I've bucketed into and I'm going to share those with what I'm hearing as I talk about this. It'd be interesting for you to think about your organization, your team of leaders. Okay, so why do we not delegate as much as we should?

The first step is time. I don't have time. I'm faster at it. It will take too long. It takes time to delegate and to teach and to coach. And we're just moving too fast for that. Sometimes the decision does need to be made quickly or the deliverable is due soon. And there may be a legitimate reason like, Hey, I should not delegate this responsibility right now, maybe later, but right now may not be the right time.

But even when that's not the case, this time factor still shows up. So it's not just in legitimate times of, Oh, I don't have time or this is this deliverable is due immediately or the decision has to be made immediately.

[00:04:38] Right? This time is definitely like this, this, this idea of I don't have time or it takes too long or we are moving too fast is one that shows up a lot. And we've all experienced this. Right? And there's a little bit of a chicken and egg dilemma here because we know intellectually that if we invest the time on the front end, that it'll save time on the back end. But that does not necessarily make it easy to invest the

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time on the front end. Right?

Just because we know that there is a long term return on this, it doesn't mean that it's easy. It makes the decision easy. So especially if you think about like the demands that our operations leaders carry. So first kind of bucket of reasons we don't delegate enough is time. The second bucket is control. I have control issues. I want it done my way. You know, there's a lack of trust. I'm afraid they won't complete the activity or that they won't make a good decision.

And here's the interesting thing about this obstacle to delegation, this control obstacle. Most of the time when you hear people talking about managers, so think about if you go in and search Google and look for articles, if you go browse social media, when people are talking about managers and how controlling they are and how they won't let go and they're so particular and it has to be done their way.

[00:06:00] These big bad managers, it's usually framed as a character flaw with the manager because of their love of power, that managers don't want to give up the power to give up the control because they're power hungry. And I got to tell you, that's not usually my observation.

So usually when I see or meet ops leaders that are struggling to delegate because of this need for control, it actually has nothing to do with power or with their personal character. My experience is that it's typically coming from the demands that they carry and the expectations, whether they're real expectations that are placed on them by the executive or perceived expectations, the responsibility. They do things right first time fast that I'm just I'm responsible for so much.

And I start to worry that when people are learning new things, mistakes are going to happen. I start to worry about the dominoes falling and not being able to recover when there are mishaps. Right. And so this is really interesting because it's coming from a place of good of service if I want to serve. But what happens is that then I hold things a little too tight.

Okay? And so my experience is that it's not a power hungry. I'm power hungry that as much as it's, you know, at the end of the day, I am ultimately accountable for this team, for our results, for how we serve our customers, for how we deliver for the organization.

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[00:07:30] And because I carry that accountability and responsibility, that's what creates this hesitation of letting that control go. Not I want personal power, right? So of course, there are ways around this. Of course, there's value in ops leaders learning to let go of some of that control. And instead of developing people through delegation and I don't just mean delegating tasks, I mean delegating responsibility and decision making and problem solving, but this fear around control, it's typically typically coming from a place of people wanting to do a good job of wanting to deliver. So we just have to redirect that desire across some different paths. Okay.

So first we're talking about three reasons that people don't delegate, and ops leaders in particular don't delegate. The first was time, the second was control, and the third is guilt. And this one surprises me a little bit. Not that I hear it, but the frequency with which I hear it. If you if I were putting this together before I was actually engaging with ops leaders, I would have put this as a miscellaneous one. But I actually hear it quite a bit and it can sound something like this. I feel guilty. My team already has a full plate. I don't want to bog them down. You know, I want to be part of the team. I don't want to be viewed as pawning my work off or as expecting them to do things that I don't do.

[00:08:52] I've heard it. As you know, a good manager removes burdens and obstacles for their teams. They take things from their teams. What I'm doing is putting more burden or creating more obstacles. Some version of this is what I hear that I've bucketed into this guilt category. So question for you. Have you felt this before? Have you heard this from your leaders before?

Because if I'm feeling this, then I'm going to hesitate about delegating this work. And, you know, this one is really interesting because what I'm trying to do is I'm trying not to burden my team. But what typically happens is when I don't delegate enough, I actually create more burden for the team because now I've created a bottleneck where the team is dependent on me for some sort of decision making or troubleshooting or problem solving or action.

There's something that I'm now a bottleneck and they and I, they have to wait for me and they can't operate independently. They can't operate autonomously. And so my what's driving this desire is to support the team, not to put burden on them. But what actually happens is when I don't delegate enough,

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they I'm not developing them to be able to own things, then I do put burden on them because then they feel a sense of dependency to me. So interesting how that works. So here's these three main buckets time control and guilt.

[00:10:21] Now, I've heard other reasons too. Like I don't know how to do it effectively. In fact, this is usually this can actually drive those other three main buckets. If I have delegated ineffectively and I've had a bad experience delegating. And the result was that it ended up wasting time or it had a bad outcome that that did have the dominoes falling or that just had a lot of negative results or it created extra burden on the team. Right? If I did it in effective this past, ineffective delegation can actually heighten those three main categories.

So when we learn how to delegate more effectively, we can mitigate the time control and guilt buckets that are holding us back. I've also heard reasons like being concerned about the lost efficiencies and it may impact the PNL or the results.

So as an Ops leader, I have accountability for results and we know that when people are learning new things, performance is going to dip a little bit because they're learning new things. And so if I have a lot of people learning things a lot of the time, then what is what is that going to do to my PNL? Right?

And so I've heard that, again, coming from that responsibility and accountability place. I've also heard that, you know, this is the part of my job that I really love, I'm passionate about, and I don't really want to give it up because this may be my favorite part of my job or it's the part that I think I create the most value.

[00:11:44] This is where I think my strength lies and I create the most value here, so I don't want to let it go. So here's the thing. These are real obstacles that hold operations leaders back from developing their teams through delegation. Okay? So whether it's these little miscellaneous things or those three main categories, time control and guilt.

And so these are the things that are holding us back. And so in the next episode, we're going to continue this conversation and explore more about reasons to delegate the why you might choose to overcome

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one of these obstacles and delegate anyways.

Now, in the meantime, I want to put it back in your court. What's the current state in your personal leadership as a leader, in your role or in your organization? Your team, the team of leaders that you are responsible for? What are the reasons that you don't delegate as much as you should? Or what are the reasons that leaders on your team don't delegate as much as they should? This topic just might open up some great dialog during a one on one or team discussion.

So stay tuned for the next episode as we continue our conversation on delegation and particularly in the next episode as we talk about the reasons to delegate. That's it for now. Until next time.