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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] Happy day of gratitude. What do you have planned for tomorrow? I'm thinking some volunteering, some food and football with new friends is probably how my day will shape up. It is this holiday season where, at least in the US, we cram a whole bunch of holidays, connection events and activities and time off work all into a few months of time.

Here at Process Plus Results, we're actually going to take a step back for the holidays. And that means that we are hitting the pause button on the podcast to take a break. And when we come back from the break, we're going to evaluate what we want to focus on and how that might look. So I know I'll be back in 2024 in some form, but I'm not sure exactly when that's going to happen or in what capacity.

Of course, we will send an email out letting you know more next year, and we will update with a podcast release to tell you what to expect once we're ready and once we figure it out ourselves.

For today, I want to talk about values and particularly organizational core values or foundational values. Now in some companies, these are just plastered on a wall or they're written in a team member handbook. Maybe you have to memorize them at some point in your career, but that's kind of it.

The organization will still end up adopting some sort of norms of how they operate and how they show up and how they make decisions, but they're probably not that intentional, and they may not look anything like the words on paper, the values that are written down.

[00:02:04] Now in other companies and with other leaders. Core values mean something. They describe what's important to us and who we aspire to be. They tell us how to interact with each other and show us what the bond is. That's consistent. That thing that makes us all part of the same team, the thing that pulls us together as one, even though we all have diverse backgrounds and individual experiences and they tell us how we make decisions.

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And I have worked with several companies who do really good work with their values. I see those values show up in how people actually behave. I hear them talked about and used in recognition and used during conflict during that productive conflict. I see artifacts of how the values are integrated into their reward systems, and their meeting facilitation values are translated into behaviors, and performance management will often tie back to how those unhelpful behaviors violate or deviate from core values. It doesn't mean that there are perfect all the time, or that leaders nail it all the time. I mean, I fail on the regular, I get frustrated or I react too fast, or I interrupt people instead of listening.

[00:03:21] I have to stop myself all the times. Sometimes I catch it beforehand, but a lot of times it's kind of in the moment and I'm having to stop and redirect, or even afterwards I have to reflect and adjust on my own or with a group. So it's okay if we don't live our values in every single moment. But the point is that we as leaders see those values. We appreciate those values. We aspire to behave in alignment with those those values.

And I got to tell you, I really appreciate when I see companies doing this, because it shows an intention and a commitment of building a company toward a defined vision. Right? Kind of building something on purpose. Now, even these companies who are doing great values work can sometimes fall into a trap, and it is the hardest trap of all when it comes to core values.

So here's the thing. When the rubber meets the road or whatever, saying, you know, cliché saying you want to use, right? But what it comes down to with core values is they matter when we make hard decisions. Core values matter most when we are facing hard decisions. It's easy to honor our core values when the decision is aligned. When all I have to do is show, look, see, we're acting in line with our core values. Yay us!

[00:04:49] But the real test as to whether we're an organization of core values or a leader of core values, comes when we're faced with a hard decision. When you have to make a decision to lose revenue, or to take a hit to profit, or to say no to a customer, or to walk away from a partner, that can be painful. It can be a painful, difficult decision to make.

But when your core values are being challenged by not having the courage to make that hard decision,

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when you put your core values on the shelf just this one time, well, the consequences are too great to be in alignment with who we say we are. Just this one decision. Then are you a company of those values or not? Are you a leader of those values or not?

I know it's not usually that black and white. You might look at four different options for the decision, and each one has some varying alignment or misalignment with the values. And so you can kind of spin it this way or that way. You can massage it and say, well, here we got this, but we have this, right, I get it, it's a gray zone. Most things are. Most hard decisions are. Typically, though, you know in your heart, if you pause long enough and create enough reflection space to tell yourself the truth.

[00:06:08] You know when that decision just doesn't align with your values. Maybe you find a way to spin it, but if you're really telling the truth, you're making that decision not from a place of values, but from some other factor. Maybe it's fear. Fear of what the financial implications are if you don't just do that layoff. Instead of finding a way forward that's aligned with your values or fear of what the financial implications are, if you say no to that big customer who's disrespecting and bullying your team all the time.

Or fear of what happens if you let go of that high performing salesperson who repeatedly violates your core values? Maybe it's shame. Shame of not living up to an expectation or two commitments that you've made. Shame of failure. Shame of not fitting in or not belonging. It takes significant courage to make the values based hard decision, and it might create more work, because those decisions are usually hard, because they have some sort of negative consequence, some sort of less than desirable outcome that will happen.

If it wasn't hard, then we wouldn't be talking about it. So having the courage to accept the negative outcome because you made a values aligned right decision and then leading the team to navigate through that outcome will do more for building a values based organization than anything else you do.

[00:07:33] People noticed team members notice. They notice when we say one thing but do another when we say that integrity is one of our core values, maybe it's one of our four core values is integrity. But then we repeatedly cave to a customer or a supplier who violates integrity as a pattern.

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They notice when we say we value respect, but then we don't step in. When a customer or supplier shows a pattern of disrespecting our team. They notice when we say we value process, but then we repeatedly celebrate or reward the high achieving individual who acts as a lone ranger and goes around process to just do their own thing. They notice, and perhaps more importantly, they stop believing you. They stop trusting you. Their commitment to the values and the vision of the organization dissipates.

None of us are perfect. We are going to make misaligned decisions. It will happen, period. It will happen even when we're trying to do the right thing. As leaders, we have a responsibility to challenge ourselves, to reflect on our own behaviors and decisions, and to challenge each other. The next time you or your leadership team are faced with one of those hard decisions, I encourage you to run it against your core values.

[00:08:46] If we were acting in alignment with our core values and vision, if we had to become the leaders and the organization that we aspire to be, then what would we do? How would the leader I aspire to be behave? What decision would I make if I were already that leader? How would the leadership team I aspire to build behave? What decision would they make if we had already become the leadership team I aspire to build?

What decision would that team make? It will be uncomfortable, but it can be really impactful. To ground yourself and your leadership team in that dialog as you progress in making hard decisions. All right, that's it for this episode. And this is our Lean leadership for ops manager sign off for calendar year 2023.

I'm wishing you a wonderful holiday season with your friends and family. Hoping you make time for reflection, for dreaming, and for planning. We'll be back sometime in 2024. The exact time and format is still up for determination. Thank you for tuning in, for sharing our podcast episodes with your colleagues, and for continued to support the work that we're doing. Happy holidays. Until next time.

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