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LEAN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Video 3: Develop Leaders Who Coach Decision Making and Problem Solving

Jamie Parker here. Today we're talking about what operations leaders need to do to develop highly effective teams to deliver results and to overcome challenges. We're really looking at it from a continuous improvement and respect for people perspective. Not just from the continuous improvement side if you have a Lean office or continuous improvement practitioners, but really from the operations leader side. What do operations leaders need to do to really drive this?

So, let's dive in. We'll get slides up and jump right in. So, you are a senior leader or executive within operations, and you have decided to practice Lean or a continuous improvement methodology, and because of that, you are all in on problem solving. We think about problem solving both from a project perspective, as well as from a team perspective, team member perspective, on the floor everyday problem solving, right? We're thinking about both.

And you've invested maybe in some training or some consulting or workshops or online training, whatever it is, you've invested to help your operations team leaders become better problem solvers and because of that, you have seen some level of results. Whatever that might be for you, you've had some level of result that makes you say, "Hey, this is the right track. I want to stay on this track". But you know that there's more you could have. You know that there's so much more out there and when I talk to leaders like you, here's what I hear. I hear that the current state of problem solving looks like this.

It tends to be a skill that's limited to trained practitioners or just to the senior managers, and so it's not an everybody culture. I also hear that problem solving is isolated to maybe a few departments or functions. Maybe it's a CI office or the quality department that really is doing problem solving and skilled at problem solving but it's not something we're doing everywhere. I also hear that problem solving is sometimes event-based. So, we do really great when we do Kaizen events, or when we do 5S events, or when we do a blitz, but it's not an everyday culture. So, while we're all in on this problem-solving idea, and we know that when we can create a culture of problem solving and learning, then we can continuously improve and always stay flexible and adaptable in our market. But today, we don't have an everybody, everywhere, everyday culture and here's what I want to say.

Your operations leaders have likely developed above-average problem-solving skills. At some point in the organization, maybe not every operations leader but somewhere you have operations leaders who have had some exposures to A3 or PDSA or Kata, or to some sort of scientific thinking or systematic problem solving and they've had a chance to practice. They've had a chance to look at data, look for the facts, do root cause analysis, and do different



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methodologies on selecting countermeasures and testing countermeasures, so there's some level of competency.

They might need some more development on problem solving but what I find is that that's not the problem as much as it is this. It's that whatever level of problem-solving capability your leaders have, it is above average, but problem solving is not the same skill as coaching problem solving. You see, your leaders have become really good, they can make decisions, they can troubleshoot, they have some level of systematic problem solving, maybe root cause analysis.

They have these skills and these skills even work against them because, because they have the skills that probably got them promoted in the first place, what happens is those skills jump in the way, and instead of coaching team members to problem solve, they end up doing. When we're coaching problem solving, it's not problem solving. It's now coaching. That means we want to transfer the thinking from us as leaders to the team member, the learner who is learning to develop their problem-solving capability. The person who is learning needs to learn how to do the thinking, so we have to transfer that. The way we need to transfer that is we need to coach improvement and problem solving.

We do that by asking good coaching questions that will develop the capabilities of others. Why do we do this? Because when we do this effectively and consistently, then we have more people solving more problems so that we create more value. That's the core. The way that our operations are successful is when we create more value. That's at the core of all of this, right?

So, I want to tell you about Brian. I was working with a team of operations leaders. Brian was one of the plant managers and Brian's when I call, "Answer Man" because here's what would happen, and here's what I saw when I was watching things happen. Brian would be on the floor, he's working with his team, and somebody would come up and say, "Hey, Brian, I've got this issue. What should I do?" So, Brian would say, "Oh, yeah, you should do this". Someone else would say, "Hey, Brian, we've got this equipment problem. We've got this machine problem. What should we do?" He's like, "Oh, you know what, let me call the vendor". Somebody else would say, "Hey, Brian, 'So and So' wants this expedited, should we do it?" He'd say, "Well, we can do this or this, how about we go ahead and do this?"

So, what was happening [was] team members were learning over and over and over that Brian had the answers. So much so that Brian said, "Hey, Jamie, I want to do all of this improvement work but I am so busy with either firefighting or doing all of these PDCA problem solving that I don't have time to do my job. What was really happening [was], Brian would take a monkey, from a team member, take the problem, take the issue, take the decision. So, it's not just really systematic A3 problem solving. It's also decision making when there's not a clear black and white answer in a process for how to do this. So, that decision making, that troubleshooting, that systematic problem solving would come on and Brian would take it. And Brian wasn't doing this because he didn't trust his people. He was actually coming from a place of good intent.

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You see, Brian's background was in the military, so he really came from this idea that leaders serve others. He said, "Jamie, look, I hear you on having the team do some problem solving, and me not giving all the answers but won't that make me a bad leader?" He said, "Here's the thing, they have so much to do already; if I also have them do all of this troubleshooting and systematic problem solving then aren't I just piling on?"

So, we worked with Brian, and here's what happened. We started down this path, we did some training and teaching with his team to help them get some core basic skills and then he started transitioning into coach. They had a project that they were working on, and instead of giving the answer, normally Brian would have jumped in and he would have done all of the iterations until he got it, and he would have said, "Hey, here's the new process for how we pack this product".

Instead of doing that he let the team do it, and Brian said that he learned three things. He said, "First of all, when the team solves problems, they usually come up with a better solution because they're the ones that do the work". He said, "Second of all, when the team is doing the problem solving, when they're making the decisions, when they're doing the testing and the iteration and coming up with the new system and the new processes, that have better execution when they're involved in that. Instead of having to go back and manage to compliance, they just stick with it because they were involved, and they were doing some of the thinking.

Then finally he said, "You know, I thought that I was giving them a burden, that I was piling on it but I've had one on ones over the last month and in these one on ones I've been asking the question, 'What's your favorite part of your job?' What I keep hearing is 'improvement, problem solving, coming up with creative solutions'. So here I was, I thought I was piling on. I thought I would have been piling on if I had done this. I thought that when I jumped in and took the problem on myself, that I was actually removing a burden for them, that I was making it easier for them. But what I was really doing was removing the joy. I was taking away their favorite parts of their jobs".

So, here's the thing, you might be at a place where you're watching your operations leaders, and you're seeing that they are so completely overwhelmed because people keep coming to them. "Hey, what should we do? Hey, what should we do?" And they're like, Brian, and they're saying, "Hey, executive, I want to do this improvement stuff. I want to help us systematically improve our business, but I am so busy I am drowning over here. I don't have time for that".

Maybe you're at a point where hey, you got some improvement, but then you kind of stalled out. You got to a point where you were capped out, and then things got stagnant and you need to figure out how can we move beyond this point. Maybe you've had tremendous results, but you know your market is changing and you need to come up with new ways, innovative ways that are going to make a difference. Or maybe, with the impact of COVID-19, everything's

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turned upside down, and you need all hands on deck in making decisions and problem solving because we don't have time for senior leadership to get involved in everything.

Whatever your situation is, here's what you know. You know that to be successful, not just today, but in a sustainable way, you have got to expand decision making and problem solving. You've got to expand beyond just this inner circle and develop those skills, not just by saying "Hey, you make the decisions now", but by developing the skills, developing the capabilities. Not just through some learning and development training program but because your operations leaders are coaching problem solving every day. They're coaching decision making every day.

In other words, you need your operations leaders to move from doing all of the problem solving, to also coaching problem solving. It's key, it's a key, critical shift that we have to make, and we have to start making it now. The longer we wait, then the longer it takes for us to get those results. More people solving more problems will allow us to create more value, and it will allow us to respond to things like COVID-19, to whatever changes in the market may come next. You go work on those strategic things. Get your operations leaders to develop people to work on the things in their span of care.

If this sounds like something that you need, I encourage you to click the button to schedule a call. We'll get together and we'll talk and get a feel for where you are, where you want to go, and what those challenges are. You can get to ask me questions, get a feel for me, see if it's a good fit. If it is, we'll do some more investigation, get some more input points, and then I'll serve as your architect in developing a recommendation for how we can develop your leaders.

Then together we'll do that. It might include on-site work, whether that's training work, implementation work, coaching work, mentoring work. It might be virtual work, whether again, could be training, could be mentoring, could be one on one coaching, whatever looks right for you. It's most likely going to be some version of both because it's not just a workshop. This isn't a one and done, you go to a workshop and now everybody can coach. This requires ongoing development of your operations leaders and I encourage you to start that process now. When we develop our operations leaders to develop people to become better decision-makers and better problem solvers, then we become more adaptable. If this sounds interesting, or if this sounds relevant for you, click that button, schedule a call, and let's get the process started.