

NON-LEADERLY THINGS BOSSES NEED TO STOP DOING

Welcome to *The Highly Valued Leader* podcast where I make it simple for leaders at all levels to amplify their value. My name is Mel Savage and I went from working in the mailroom at a small ad agency to making multiple six figures in senior management at McDonald's, to running my own multiple six-figure executive coaching business. I've had huge successes in my career and epic failures. All of it taught me the world-class leadership, mind and skill sets that I simplify for my clients and share with you on this podcast. I'll help you reset your leadership style, demystify the politics, and help you become the highly valued leader everyone wants on their team. Get ready for the most honest, direct and revolutionary leadership coaching you've ever heard. Let's simplify leadership together.

Hey, leaders. Welcome back to the podcast. Today, we're talking about something that I've been thinking about a lot. I've been hearing a lot of stories from my clients about relationships with their bosses. While generally speaking, my intention is always to be positive and focused on solutions to problems. It's always good as a boss and as a leader to do a little self-check and really determine 'Am I being the best boss I can be? Are there things habits, that I've learned to role model over the years that actually aren't serving me as a boss.'

So today, what I want to talk about and what I want to focus on is something I'm calling 'non-leaderly things bosses should stop doing.' Specifically, today I'm talking about stopping doing things with your people like how you manage people, because there are lots of non-leaderly things bosses should stop doing. I could probably be here for hours and hours. And believe me, I have done all of them. But I thought I would focus on a few things in the context of how you're leading people.

This might also spill into relationships you have with colleagues, like peers or even managing up the organization. Obviously, it won't present the same way, but the intention might be the same. The root cause might be the same, that sort of thing. So listen carefully to some of these things and see if it's showing up as a pattern not only with your people but in other areas of your life.

One of the reasons that I wanted to name this podcast the way that I did was because I have a reel, just a short reel that I did on this same topic with the same title. And it was one of the most watched social video reels that I had done. Some of the things I'm going to talk about today go deeper and broader than what I put in my reel. But what it said to me was, this is something that people are interested in. Sometimes, of course, it's from the perspective of the employee thinking, "Yeah, my boss should stop doing these things." But also, it's from the perspective of the boss.

I think if people are going to tune in and watch because of the name, then I'm okay with that. Because at the end of the day, my intention is to provide solutions. So while I might be talking in the negative today, like, *this is what you shouldn't do*, of course, I'm also going to be talking about what you could be doing instead, always. I don't

want to just talk about shaming people. That is never my intention to shame people. My intention is for us to just take a moment to recognize how our behavior might have slowly over time slid in the wrong direction.

As leaders, we can always do small self-corrections. We can make adjustments without shame and without judgment. If it takes a few minutes for us to go, "Shit, I shouldn't be acting that way. That's not very literal of me." Take a moment to feel bad about it, but then let's go. Let's go about practicing being different and becoming the leader that you want to be.

What I'm going to cover today are some non-leaderly things. I'm going to bucket them into three, but there's a lot in each one. I try to be succinct. I try to make these podcasts like 15 minutes long, but they're always like 30-40 minutes long. Some non-leaderly things that leaders need to stop doing when it comes to managing their people; I'm going to talk about why you might be doing it because sometimes we don't even know why we're doing these things. It's good to have insight into why we do it because then we can reframe why we're doing it so that we can do it differently. And of course, like I said, I'm going to give you some strategies on what to do instead.

But let's start with why we might be doing why are we doing these things. How did we acquire these non-leaderly habits that we're still executing so far into our journey as a leader? And I think the main challenge is, we're kind of thrown into leadership. How people become leaders is really weird because we are taught about getting things done. We're taught to be really great individual contributors, driving results, and always taking action. Then you step into leadership, you're kind of thrown in.

And leadership is so much about emotional intelligence, not just general competence. And we're not actually groomed in emotional intelligence on the way up to becoming a leader, but then we're thrown into leadership, and it's kind of a sink or swim mentality. We have to figure out not only how to transition our level of competence from getting the results to learning to get the results through other people, which in and of itself is a major shift, but also learning to develop that emotional intelligence when honestly, so many people around us don't have it.

I think more and more business schools and leadership programs, I was just seeing one from a really big school. It wasn't Wharton. I want to say Columbia, but I can't remember that is "pioneering" leadership training that is much more embedded in emotional intelligence and learning how to focus on that first and cognitive behavior, versus just talking about what great leaders are competent at. Because telling you what to be competent at doesn't actually help you be competent at it unless you already have that mindset around it.

So learning how to cognitively create self-awareness, and then shift those behaviors is the trick. That's how you change habits. But we don't know any of that when we first become a leader. And we develop some bad habits that are generally grounded in survival, like just figuring it out, and what works and what doesn't to get the results out without a lot of great role models. In fact, we have a lot of bad role models in this area. There are good ones out there, but sometimes they're not our boss. Sometimes there's someone else's boss or someone you admire from afar.

Sometimes we work in a culture that encourages, "emotionally unintelligent" behavior. I'm sure I'll come up with a better terminology as I go through this. But certainly, it's a culture that's more focused on results and not failing, and just churning through people than one that focuses on nurturing people to develop great results. Because the more we actually nurture people, it takes time, but it actually generates a more sustained type of culture, where you actually keep people and get better results over the long term versus just churning through people constantly.

First of all, I was a really shitty leader for a lot of years. And I want to give myself some credit. I also was a really good leader in some aspects as well. But a lot of my bad habits, I would say, or my less than literal habits, I learned honestly, from people I admired and who role-modelled certain leadership styles for me.

I remember one of the very first leaders that I worked for, I won't give you her name, but she was like an *iron fist* type of leader. I worked for her at an ad agency. The client was General Motors and I was fairly new to account services. She had a real sort of the 'either-you-make-me-look-great' or 'I'm-going-to-hate-you' type of behaviour. She wasn't overt about it like that.

But for instance, I've told a story before where I did an advertising launch plan for General Motors on our new car launch and we actually got the wrong budget. We took the fleet budget versus the consumer budget. Obviously, the fleet budget was a lot higher than the consumer budget. So when we got out there and found out that our budget was wrong, obviously, we needed to slash our plan by quite a bit. General Motors was totally awesome about it. My boss was terrible about it. She didn't talk to me for a week, she wouldn't look me in the eye, and she basically told me that I made her look bad and that if I ever did that again, I would be fired.

I was so young and so junior, and this was my first car advertising plan that I put together. I didn't even know the difference between fleet and consumer budgets so I just took the budget that I got. I asked for it from GM and they gave me the fleet budget, and I didn't know enough to know that it was the wrong budget. Instead of even talking to me and helping me understand my mistake, she would always be passive-aggressive like, "I guess you could do it that way... If you want to make us look bad... If you want to fail..." or stuff like that. I'm paraphrasing, but she was she was like that.

At the same time, the people there thought she was great. Or at least that was my perception that this woman could do no wrong, the clients loved her, her boss loved her, and everyone talked about how amazing she was. So I thought, 'This is what great leadership looks like.' I didn't know so I acted that way, too. It's one thing to read things in a book. But when you're seeing someone be successful live and in technicolor right in front of you, you're thinking, "This is who I need to be successful. This is practical, not theoretical. I'm looking at it." And so we start to develop bad habits over time.

I started to become a bit more iron-fisted, as well, a bit more passive-aggressive, and a bit more egotistical in terms of how things made me look, versus being there to support my team, which took me a lot longer to get to. I definitely took the long route around, which actually, in the end, I think makes me a better coach because I've made all the mistakes. I totally understand the mindsets that take us down these rabbit holes because I've thought this way in the past. And that's what really helps me be empathetic to my clients and understand what they're going through. Then of course, having come out on the other side of it, I'm able to help them make the shift as well.

I know being a bad leader sucked for a lot of people, including myself, but now I'm going to try and turn it around and do good with it. That's all we can do at this point. We can't change the past, but we can decide how we want to use the past to create a more productive future for ourselves. I know that sounds really lovely, and it is. It's harder to do than just saying it, but it is pretty awesome to be able to do that.

I want to talk about three different ways that we are non-leaderly with our people. The point of this, of course, like I said, is just to be a better leader. Not to beat yourself up, not to use this information as a weapon against yourself, but be a better leader, get better results from your team, and grow good leaders out there because your team needs to have a great role model to follow for the future. So think about the cascading impact of what

you're doing here. The shadow that you're casting with your team is going to either create a long line of amazing leaders or there's going to be some leaders that slip through the cracks. All of our lives impact so many others.

And I think, too beyond just getting great results from your team and growing these great leaders, it's also going to improve your own reputation. Maybe now you're seen as one kind of leader who's maybe really competent in what they do, but has some things that are holding them back i.e. how you manage people and how you grow your people. And here are some ways that you can improve on that. And this is not just for new leaders like I see this well into leadership. So listen up, my friends.

The first bucket I want to talk about is just feedback. Feedback is so critical, and we all screw it up so much. I screwed it up so much, too. There are two types of feedback that I would say you should try to stay away from. That's really a non-leaderly way to approach feedback. One is just giving someone really thoughtless feedback that's really designed to get something off your chest versus helping them. We've all been there where someone, let's say doesn't deliver something on time or like me completely screws the pooch in terms of the foundation of a presentation.

Once the budget was so wrong, we worked on ideas that we could never possibly have executed. So someone really doesn't do a great job with something. And rather than focusing on them and their growth, you focus on how frustrated you are, how they made you look bad and how they should never do something. You just need to get it off your chest. And this could work in lots of different ways.

I was coaching someone today whose boss dropped a really big bombshell on them. It wasn't about them, it was about the organization, but they dropped a really big bombshell on them. My client was so angry about this bombshell on the way it was presented to her and her team that she wanted to go in there and basically talk to the boss person about how unprofessional it was, how much she expected more from them, how deceived she felt and blindsided, and that she was taken advantage of, and all these things. She wanted to get it all off her chest because she was angry. And I understand the motivation.

I'm not saying she shouldn't have been angry. Of course, I would be angry, too. I'd be angry if my person got the budget wrong. I'd be angry at first if someone dropped a bombshell on me and my team with no warning after years and years of service in partnership. Of course, I would be angry. But I'm not going to give feedback from anger. I'm not going to go from anger and frustration and give someone feedback because that's really a selfish thing to do.

Because when you do it, you don't really give a crap about how the other person feels. Your only focus is to download all your frustration on the other person so that you can feel better. And that's actually what my client said to me today. Like, *"I feel like if I had this conversation with my boss, then I'll have closure."* And of course, the way we talked about it was what's your overall goal here? What's your goal for your career in this organization? How do you want to use this as an opportunity for yourself?

Once we understood that, then I could go back and say is having this anger, download conversation with your boss help you get there? Is it the only way for you to get past this? And of course, it isn't going to help her. And it isn't the only way to get past this. That's how good coaching helps. And we've found other ways for her to get past this that actually felt better and more empowered. So not only is it feedback down, but it can be feedback across. It can be feedback up the chain of command as well.

But when your only focus is to download so that you can feel better, that is a sign that you need to stop and not say anything. Because now, all you have is a shell-shocked employee, a shell-shocked peer, or a shell-shocked boss who is not motivated by your feedback, by the way. And of course, on top of that, will no longer trust you. It's not a great way to get results when you're talking about that. So let yourself be angry. Let yourself be frustrated. Let yourself calm down. Get some emotional resilience, which is what we do in coaching. Learning the emotional resilience to kind of get refocused before you have the conversations or give the feedback, in this case. That's what you need to do.

You need to feel through your anger, or whatever it is. And then you need to get your head focused on how do I help this person if it's a report? Or what do I actually want for myself? What result do I want for myself in the case of my client? Or what would work best for the objective that we're trying to hit as a team if it's a peer, for instance? You need to reground yourself in the bigger picture and decide how to think about it so that you can have conversations that are not coming from anger. And a really good coach will help you do that.

In my client's case, we were like, I don't know why we're expecting this particular boss to act any differently. This is totally on character for this person to drop the bombshell the way that they did. It's actually our own fault that we wish they would act differently, but they're not going to. That's not who they are. So be upset about the information. But why would you expect anything different from this person? Right now, it's about how to use this information to move forward.

When you're focused on using the information you have to move forward, then you can actually park the anger. Step away from the anger and let go of the anger. I don't want to actually like parking the anger because parking the anger means you're not processing it, you're resisting it. I don't want you to resist it. I don't want you to push it down and pretend it's not there. Because in the case of my client, her boss could have said just one thing, and it's going to trigger all the anger coming out in a shitty way.

You want to feel the anger. Let it be okay, in a quiet moment by yourself, feel that anger; and then reframe your mindset to be able to focus and look forward on what the opportunity is for you, or the person, or the team. That's how you get away from giving thoughtless feedback. Stop thinking about yourself in getting closure or feeling better, start thinking about the bigger picture.

In my client's case, she needed to think about herself but not herself like, *'I need to feel better, but what do I actually want for myself in this moment? Who do I want to be in this moment?'* So it was like a bigger picture thinking of yourself. For you with your report, it could be what kind of a leader do I want to be for this person right now? What does this person need from me right now? How can I grow as a leader in this moment? these are great questions to ask yourself.

The second kind of crappy, non-leaderly way to give feedback, and this one happens all the time, leaders. So please, if you're doing this, please stop. This is one where you're passing on feedback to your report from someone else, especially when it's a peer. This happened to one of my clients this week. Their peer went to their boss. They both share the same boss, so their peer went to the boss and said so and so about my client. Then the boss just downloaded that feedback to my client. Don't do that.

What ends up happening there is, first of all, it's kind of lazy, because the person offering the feedback (my client's peer, in this case), obviously has a biased point of view. Not that they're out to get my client, but they have their own point of view on this thing. Even if they're more senior, it wasn't a peer, they have their own point of view

on this thing. And you pass it along and just dump it on your report, let's say in this case, means that you don't care about your report's point of view. You don't seek to understand.

There's a second thing here that's kind of lazy. In my client's case, like in the situation the client explained to me, the leader didn't actually take the opportunity to coach their other report and say, *"Have you had this conversation with this person directly? Why haven't you? Why do you think that they were reacting that way?"* Versus just dumping negative feedback behind your peers' backs and then hoping the senior person is going to take it forward under the guise of, *"I'm only trying to help,"* which is the thing that drives me crazy when people say, *"I was only trying to help."* No, you were not only trying to help. Let's be honest here.

If you're really wanting to help, you would go to the person and have a conversation with them in order to support them. So I think the opportunity here for the leader, in this case, was first to coach the person who's offering the feedback to offer the feedback directly and understand why they're not and why they're thinking the way that they are and really help them grow. And then, if the feedback is critical and needs to be given to the reporter, in this case, my client, then one, have the peer do it. Two, sit down with both of them and have a conversation.

Or if for some reason, that's not possible, if you're going to sit down with your report, say, *"Look, I heard this. Tell me your side of it. Tell me what was going on for you. Tell me what you think about this feedback."* And if you agree with it, how would you do it differently next time? Really have a conversation. Don't just assume what someone else says, even if it's the friggin president of the company giving the feedback. Don't just assume what someone else says is the blind truth and then just disseminate it like your broken telephone. That is a really shitty thing to do to someone.

If you take nothing else from this podcast, don't pass along feedback. You can tell I get really worked up on this one, I'm very passionate about it. Because you really break someone's spirit by that and you break so much trust with that person, not just between you and the person. But now, for instance, with my client, she doesn't trust the other person. Just rebuild the trust with the other person. It just causes so many problems in your team. It breaks trust, it hurts the culture of your team, and on and on. I would definitely say do not pass on feedback from someone else to report. There are so many other ways to do it. That's the first bucket. I could talk about just this bucket of feedback for hours.

Let's talk about the second bucket, which is avoiding conversations because you're scared. Or you're worried about how someone's going to react to what you want to say to them. It's kind of a people-pleasing thing because we don't want to do it because we don't want to deal with the fallout. We don't want other someone mad at us. Or we don't know how to handle someone being upset. We don't want them to be upset. We want them to be totally cool and take the feedback, even if it's tough like a champ. Of course, sometimes they don't.

Before I get to the solution, here are some other ways that people kind of do it wrong. One, they just avoid doing it completely. Or they do it, but in the most tentative way in order to try to control the reaction of the person. And it just makes it worse. I'll give you an example: *"Well, I just wanted to talk to you about this thing. I want you to know that you're really good at your job. But there was this one thing that happened the other day, and I'm sure you didn't mean to do it, but blah, blah..."* And you're like, *"What the hell are you talking about, lady?"* It actually makes it so much worse. We're trying to soften the blow. We're like, don't be mad, don't get angry. But really, the person can take the feedback any way they damn well choose.

Our job is to be very clear about the feedback. The clearer, the better. And then help the person digest it. There is a great section of the book, *Radical Candor*, which is the first section. I mentioned it a few times because I think

this book for this particular issue, set it most succinctly. It's about challenging directly and caring personally. When it comes to having a tough conversation with someone, it could be feedback, or it could be anything, a tough conversation with somebody, you just want to be direct.

Being direct doesn't mean being mean or tough or insensitive in some way, you can still be empathetic. And that's about caring personally. Caring personally, to me means creating safety for the person, demonstrating that you care about them, you care about their future, and you're giving them this feedback and then having a conversation about what to do next. How can they grow? Or how can they handle it? Or what should they do? Whatever it is, I love this idea of challenging directly and caring personally, which comes from the book *Radical Candor*.

I still use that one all the time, because I like it. I think it's the right balance for how to have conversations with people. When you're wishy-washy, the person stops trusting you because they're like, *"Just tell me what's going on. You're trying to give me direct feedback, but you don't want me to have an emotional reaction."* Our job is to let the people have an emotional reaction. If they're going to cry, people always talk about how it's unprofessional when people get upset or cry. Why? People really care about their careers, they want to do well.

When they get negative feedback or critical feedback, sometimes it's scary for them. And our job is to understand that it's scary for them and help bring them back. Let them have the moment where they're scared. Let them have the moment when they're angry, or whatever it is. And then demonstrate our support by saying, *"It's normal if you're angry, or it's normal, that you're scared about this. But let's also talk about how to move forward."* And if they have something to say about it, say, *"Tell me what you want to say about it. Tell me why you want to say that."*

They're not wrong. Their feelings aren't wrong. Their perspective might have a gem in there that's important for you to understand. We listen for understanding. We're having a conversation. We let the person have their reaction to it. And we support them through that reaction until we can bring them to a place where they can logically and pragmatically move forward. That's okay. There's nothing wrong with someone being upset or crying or whatever. Who cares? Let them have their reaction. Be there for them.

I have been there where I'm scared to have conversations with people. But you know what? When you have the kind of conversation that I'm talking about, it actually brings you so much more together. They trust you so much more when you're just direct with them and supportive of them. When they see that you are in it to help them be better, it creates safety. And that's what you need to have to have these conversations. You have to create a safe space for these conversations to happen.

The third bucket of non-leaderly behavior I wish bosses would stop doing with their people is not deciding if you're in or out on somebody. Let me explain what I mean by that. A lot of the time, people will have a "problem" employee. And they'll talk about how they're trying to help them, they want the best for them, they don't want to fire them, and all this kind of stuff. But at the same time, we're not really committed to them. We're kind of in limbo, like, *"I'm not sure if they're the right person on the team."*

So we have these two schools of thought where we truly want to help them and we want them to be better, and we're not sure if they're the right ones on the team. We sort of stay in this limbo where we don't really give them our best, we judge them and then also try to help them. It's a tough place to be. And a lot of us, myself included,

have hung out in this space where we're sort of half-pregnant on somebody if you will. We're in limbo with this person.

What I often say to my clients is, do you want them on your team? Or don't you? And they're like, "Yeah, yeah, I do. I do. But but but..." I'm like, no. If you really want to help them, then you need to decide that you are all in on this person. And you give yourself a timeline. You don't have to be all in forever. But you can say, "Look, I'm going to go all in for three months. I'm going to go all in. I'm going to be there. I'm going to dedicate the time. I'm going to get in the right mindset to not just be frustrated and disappointed with them."

Really go all in on nurturing this person and do whatever it takes to make them grow and setting clear expectations along the way for yourself as much as this person like shared expectations on what their growth is going to look like and what they're trying to achieve. But there's a lot involved in this. When you commit 100%, like, "I'm going all in. And when they make a mistake, I'm not going to get frustrated. Here's how I'm going to handle it with my own mind, etc."

When you go all in like that on somebody, then you can really make progress, then you can really make a dent. But when you're like half-in, half-out, you're not really showing up as your best leader. And then another thing that happens, which has happened to me and I don't love it, I don't recommend it. But it's kind of part of this when you're in the limbo, is you gaslight someone so that they quit. So you don't have the courage, let's say, to get them to quit, or you don't want to go through the whole PIP process. Or for whatever reason, you don't want to deal with it, but you just gaslight them.

You ignore them, you don't invite them to things, you just pick at every little decision they make as something that's bad judgment, whatever. You're just extra impatient with this person. So eventually, they break down, they lose their confidence, and they quit. It is such a shitty thing to do to somebody. It is such a lazy leadership. It's traumatizing and it does so much damage to the person, which is unnecessary.

If you could just step up and be like, "I want this person to quit. Let's just do the most humane thing here. I don't want them on my team so we're going to be humane about it... We're going to pay them or we're going to go through the PIP process..." Whatever it is to help them. If you decide you're going to go through the PIP process, obviously, it's because you're committed to helping this person. But if you don't want the person on your team, then move them. Find somewhere else, relocate them, or pay them out. But don't torture the person.

By the way, it's not fun for you, either the whole time, even though you're the one in control so to speak of the situation. It's still you suffering. You are frustrated, but you're not dealing with it in a leaderly way. So I say the way to do this is just to make a decision. Are you all in or are you all out? And then decide to be humane. Be the most humane you can be with this person and the most respectful you can be to the person that you can financially be.

In summary, basically, the three non-leaderly things I wish bosses would stop doing for their people, in this case, are one, you got to get on track with the feedback. Stop giving thoughtless feedback designed to get something off your chest, and focus on the needs of the person to grow. Deal with your own emotions on your own, and then you can focus on the person. Also part of that, please stop passing along feedback from someone else. Get that person to pass it along themselves, or have a conversation with your report about it. That's two-way. Not just like, "Oh, this person said this. So stop doing it." That sort of thing is so frustrating.

Second, stop avoiding conversations because you're scared. What are you really scared of? The person's reaction? Just let them have it. They're allowed to. You get to focus on being direct with obviously, some sensitivity. So challenge directly and care personally. You don't have to control their reaction, you just need to give them the feedback with the intention of helping them for real; not like, "I'm just trying to help..." Not that. That's not for real. For real, trying to help them grow, which again, is a conversation.

Lastly, decide if you're in or out on someone. Stop being half-pregnant, half-in, half-out every day, and so confused about what to do with this person. Don't be confused. That's a choice you're making. Stop being confused, make a decision, and then be the most humane you can be. If you're going to exit the person or go all frigg'in in if you're going to help this person. You can set a timeline for yourself, but go all in, and then assess again.

That's what I have for you this week, my leaderly friends. Pick one thing from this podcast, go out, and just practice. If you have any questions, send me an email. Talk to you soon. Bye for now.

Hey, if you want to simplify leadership while amplifying your value, then you need to get your hands on my free training. Head over to melsavage.com/simple for instant access to the training and get a taste of how I help my clients lead with ease and make more money in the process. I'll see you there.

