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# HOW TO LET PEOPLE DO THINGS THEIR WAY (WHEN MY WAY IS BETTER)

*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 there, leaders. Welcome back to the podcast. It's great to have you here. This week, I want to talk to the people who are overmanaging, and you know who you are. You might be micromanaging, or you might be overmanaging. Basically, you want to control all the things that you and your team are doing. And because of that, you are working way too much every weekend and at night trying to fit your work in around working with everyone else.

So today, what I'm really hoping we can do is get you shifted out of that overmanaging or micromanaging role and move you closer to becoming a coaching type of leader. There are lots of different kinds of leadership. Sometimes you'll be with your people–a mentoring leader, or you'll be a teaching leader. But quite often, what people forget to do, or they don't practice enough is a coaching type of leader. And what that's going to do is help. It's going to help you build a team of people who can think for themselves. You're going to get them thinking. You're going to get them more aware and thinking through things. And that's going to help them deliver better results faster, meaning get to a place where they are operating at a higher level faster.

So today, I'm going to cover why you're behaving this way. You might know why you're behaving this way, or you may not know why you're behaving this way. I might offer you some things today that you're not necessarily seeing and once you see them, you won't be able to unsee them. We're going to have to reset your thinking as well. And that's going to help you let go of the need to micromanage and instead move towards the orchestration of a team of strong performers. That's where we want to get to.

Let's start with what's happening right now with you. You're overmanaging people, we've already covered that. If that's you, this is the podcast you want to listen to. And what that really means is that you're trying to control how people do things. And you're telling them not only what they should do, but how they should do it. And I bet you're doing it beautifully. You're explaining it to them and explaining why and you're going through it step-by-step.

It's good because you're teaching them, but your expectation is not like, *'Here, let me give you this information and you go and do it your way.'* You're like, *'I'm giving you this information. I expect you to do it the way I'm asking you to do it.'* It's not really that you're teaching alone. You are teaching them because you're trying to control it. And you're getting into the weeds like, *'This is the form... This is what you do... This is how you fill it in... Here's who you*


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*need to go check with… Make sure you tell them this... Make sure you tell them that… If they say this, do this… If they say that, do that, and then come back and show it to me and let's go through it together…'* That's a lot.

I'm not saying that those things don't need to be done. I think that's one of the arguments people make. Those are all things that need to be done to be able to do this work. But when you are telling them exactly step-by-step how to do it, what they need to say, and what they need to do at each step, you're not getting them to think for themselves.; you're getting them to do it your way. And you might tell yourself, *'You know what, this is just who I am. This is how I manage. This is how I am. This is my instinct.'*

A lot of the time I hear that from my clients. *'This is who I am.'* And they give me a story about their parents and how their parents control them or maybe they're really afraid. They're making a mistake because making a mistake means danger in their household. And I totally get all of that. That's why people are controlling. *'I was extremely controlling as a manager because I was so afraid to make a mistake. And it was because in my household, making a mistake meant danger. So it would be easy for me to say, look, this is just who I am. I learned this at a young age.'*

But it's not really who you are. By the way, it's not just about micromanaging. No matter what story you're telling yourself about whatever, this is who I am, this is the way I do it, it's not who you are. It's just who you're being in that moment for those types of scenarios. It's just who you're being reactively. And that's okay. You're allowed to be whoever you want to be.

But if there are situations that you want to change, like, if you do want to become a manager that's more a coaching manager who doesn't give everyone all the answers, helps people grow, and helps people think, but you think you can't, you can; because you can choose to be any way you want to be. That's why coaching is there. So the reason that you are micromanaging people is not because that's who you are. If that's the reason you're telling yourself that you're doing this, take that off the table.

The reason that you're doing it, generally speaking, and there might be nuances here for you is for two reasons. One, you just don't want to fail in this leadership gig. Maybe you're a new leader, maybe you've got a new job as a leader in a new organization, and you're trying to prove yourself. The minute you try to say you're proving yourself, all of a sudden, you are on guard. When you think you need to prove yourself, you think there's a right way to do things, like an exceptional way to do things. And proving yourself automatically to your brain means don't make a mistake.

If you are in an approving yourself mindset, I suggest you get out of it. This means just be really good at what you do. Just do your best. That will, in and of itself, demonstrate your skill set. Even if your boss comes to you and says you need to prove yourself, you don't have to act that way. You just want to show up doing what you do the best that you can. But when you are trying to prove yourself and you don't want to fail, and you're in fear of making a mistake, you try to control everything.

You try to control everything because you think if you do, you won't make mistakes. But the irony is, you're making a big mistake anyway. You're making a mistake as a leader. You're not leading, you're controlling. And that in and of itself is going to come back to bite you in the butt because you're going to piss a lot of people off. That's the first reason we do it. We don't want to fail in the new gig.

The second reason we do it is, generally speaking, as you grew up in your career as an individual contributor, your value came from doing things well so you think that's the key to your success. You think if everyone does


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everything like you, then we're all going to be successful. We won't fail because the reason you have this leadership job in the first place is because you executed really well. And so you think you just need to do more of that. And you need to teach more people to do it your way. But that's wrong. That's the opposite of what you need to do.

Your job now as a leader has shifted from getting results yourself to creating environments for results to happen to learn to get results through your team. So your job is no longer about getting things done, it's about enabling people to get things done. And you might think that by telling them step-by-step exactly what to do and what to say and who to speak to and when to do it and all the things that you're enabling them but you're not enabling them, you are controlling them and you are actually suffocating them. You are suffocating their ability to actually think creatively. And being able to think creatively is the number one skill we need in our jobs as leaders, as individual contributors to be able to think and solve problems.

But when you're doing all the thinking and you're solving all the problems, you are creating a team of robots who will eventually rise up and take over. What I mean by that is, they're going to complain about you. They're not going to want to work with you. They're going to be pissed off and they're going to tell somebody about it. And you're going to have a bigger problem on your hands. Not only do you need to now continue to learn this skill that you ideally could have learned earlier, but you also have to start to erase the old tape. You have to rebuild your brand, your relationships, and your trust with your team. So we want to minimize this transition from individual contributor to leader.

If you're like me, and you're two or three years into the leadership gig, and you're still micromanaging, you're just going to have to do what I just said. You're going to have to learn how to do it differently. You're going to have to learn how to coach effectively as a leader. And you're going to have to undo some of the damage that you've created for yourself, your brand, your team, your relationships, and all those kinds of things. It's just a bigger hill to climb, but it's not insurmountable. So you can do it.

You don't want to fail in this gig, because your value traditionally has come from getting things done, like getting things done well and executing well, and you haven't quite moved into this identity of a leader who's a coach leader who gets things done through their team, because you're sort of stuck in this place, you are also, on top of everything else, overworking yourself because you think you need to know everything about everything, and make things perfect, and be involved in every decision, *yada, yada, yada,* so you're burning out. And that's just going to make you fail even faster because you're not going to be able to think effectively and creatively enough for everybody. It's just too much work for one person. And as you burn out, you become more and more impatient and you're not able to think clearly. And so you're not going to make the best decisions for you and your team.

Micromanaging and overmanaging never lead to the good stuff. The minute you recognize that about yourself, you have to get a strategy to get out of it. And that's what I do a lot of my one-on-one clients. We build a strategy for ideally what they want leadership to look like for them in terms of team management. What kind of team leaders are they? How do they manage the situation with their team? How do they think how do they feel? How do they act? What's their mission? Who ultimately do they want to be in these situations? And we build a roadmap so they can practice being this person. That's really what you need as a strategy.

When you fix the problem and become more of a coaching leader and step away from being a micromanager, you're going to have this amazing team of people who can think for themselves and who really appreciate you for being someone who actually helps them mind their own brain and their own creativity to come up with the


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solutions. They're going to feel like you have their backs and they can trust you. And bonus, they're thinking for themselves so they're able to be effective in more and more situations.

So you have this amazing team of people who love you, love working with you, and appreciate you for making them better. And you're going to have normal work hours because you're not going to be trying to be everything to everybody all the time and make all the decisions and do all the things. And you're going to be able to have more balance which is going to help you in a self-care way. Manage your mind, rest. And that's going to help you make better decisions, think more clearly, and have more access to your own creative thinking, which is ultimately going to create better results for your department.

Mistakes are going to happen, by the way. None of this is going to be perfect. Even when you are letting people do their own thing, and you're working normal work hours, you have balance, and you're getting better results; even through all of that, mistakes are going to happen whether you control things or not, by the way. So better that you don't. It's better that you learn not to do it sooner rather than later because mistakes are going to happen either way.

But in this way, in the way we are not micromanaging, you can learn to not be panicked about it, to not freak out, to just deal with what's in front of you and solve each problem with your team as it comes up and that's going to help you feel stable in your role because you're going to know how to mitigate the impact of those mistakes. You're not going to be afraid of making mistakes anymore. Can you imagine not being afraid of making mistakes because you know that between you and your team, you can get things back on track, that mistakes are normal, and that you'll be able to manage the noise that's created in the organization?

Because sometimes, mistakes don't just impact you and your department, they impact other departments. And people like to point fingers, and they like to blame all the things that happen in some environments. And so you'll be able to not only manage the noise but use those opportunities to build collaborative relationships with your peers. I'm not going to get into all of that today. That appears in the collaborative relationships part. But there's so much good that can come out of this if you want it to.

At the end of the day, I really want you to be that calm, focused, strategic leader who just rolls with ease. I'm not saying leadership is easy, but it can be done with ease. You can access your creative thinking with ease. You can do hard things with ease, and not be a stress bag who was wound so tight and working all the time that people are afraid to come to ask a question. That's what I hope for you. Some version of that for you that suits you and who you are. And it can start by learning how to be the leader who coaches versus controls their team.

I want to go into a few things that you can do to start this process for yourself. The first one is before you do anything, you need to get your head straight. And you need to make sure that you're clear about your value equation. When I say value equation, what I'm saying is what it is that you provide that creates value for your company, your team, your boss, and your stakeholders. Because before, the way you created value was getting things done effectively. You are a great IC. But you need to redefine.

First, you need to set a goal for yourself. *How will I create value as a leader moving forward? I will no longer create value as a leader by getting everything done, I will create value as a leader by x.* When I work with my clients, we define that together. You might want to say, that *I create value as a leader by building a high-performing team, by helping my team learn to think, or by creating an environment for my team to get results.*


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There are lots of ways that you can frame this. It has to resonate for you based on what you strategically want to achieve. But you need to redefine that for yourself because there's going to be a shift in identity. And you don't have to know how to do it. You'd have to decide. Before you figure out how you're going to do something, you have to decide what it is that you're trying to create. That's the very first thing. I know a lot of people are like, *'Well, I do want to do this, but I don't know how so I can't even think about it.'* No. First, you decide what the goal is, and then you decide how to get there.

I've been running again. I've been losing a lot of weight. I've been running, weight training, and all of these things. I wasn't exactly sure how I was going to lose the weight or get back into running or whatever, exactly the right way. I had some ideas to start with that I started doing. And then along the way, I'd gotten new information and I tried new things. I thought I was going to be cycling on my Peloton but I've decided to be running on my treadmill. Things shift and you have to listen to yourself. But I know that my goal hasn't shifted, but how I'm getting there is always shifting.

So the first thing is to decide what you want your new value equation to be in the context of being a leader of people. To do that, to get there, to go from being a micromanager to becoming this new thing that you've defined, the very first belief I want you to question is the belief that your way is better. I really think that this is one of the big beliefs that stop people from letting go of control of their team is that they think they know how to do it better than everybody else. They know how to do it faster, better, and all the things. And you know what? That might be true.

Let's just pretend for a second that even is true. But that's not the point. It doesn't matter if you could do it better. I want you to think back to the best bosses you've ever had. They could probably have done your job better than you. But they let you do it. They let you do it your way, they let you make the mistakes, they let you fumble your way through it. That's your job now. It's to coach your team to figure it out, not tell them how to do things. So you either let go of the idea that your way is better, which by the way, it may not be. I know I said let's just pretend it is for a second. But it may not be. Maybe a combination of your way and their way is actually better. Maybe their way completely is something that you would never have considered and also worked.

I want to offer you the idea that there is no one way. I want you to think about the idea where, let's say you're in a room of your peers, or your boss, or whatever. A decision is made on how to move forward on something and you're like in your mind going, *'That's never going to work... That's not the way I would have done it... Yada, yada, yada...'* But you go along with it, you do it, and it ultimately ends up working. And you know why? Not because you were wrong. Your way would have worked too. It's because everybody is there trying to figure out a way to make that decision work to make the way that the decision was made to work. We can make anything work. We have no idea if it's going to take a little longer, be a little shorter, or be more effective. It doesn't really matter. It can still work.

I want you to believe there is no right way. We can make any way work. That could be a belief that you focus on instead of *my way is the best way.* I have two options for you: either let go of this whole idea that your way is better or embrace the idea that there is no right way and that you're helping your team do it their way is actually the best solution or a combination. You can also believe that even if your way is better, that's not the point of your job. The point of your job is not to get everyone to do it your way because ultimately, that's going to land you in a situation where you're not being a very good leader.

So number one, decide what your new value equation is going to be. Number two, you have to let go of the belief that your way is better. And then number three, you got to delegate. When I say delegate, I don't mean getting


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work off your plate. Delegate is not like, *you do this, you do this, you do this.* Delegation, I'm redefining it right now because ultimately, it does mean giving other people your work. I think if you look it up, it's something similar to that. But I want to redefine it for you.

When it comes to being a coaching leader, delegation is the art of getting results through a team. You want to say that again. Delegation is the art of getting results through a team. That doesn't necessarily mean you're getting work off your plate. It just means your role in the work has shifted. Because your role is there to coach your team to get results. You're focused on the person and you're letting the person focus on the problem, or the process, or the solution, or whatever. That's your role. Your role is to give them the reins. That's the delegation part. But you're not like jumping out of the car and letting them drive off a cliff. You are there with them. Guiding them by helping them see things that they may not see, and helping them think through how to solve those problems.

I've got a few things here in terms of this art of delegation that you might want to consider. The first thing is, I want you to let everything go. I do not want you to keep a pet project that you love. In context here, there might be a pet project that your boss has given you for your own growth. Something that's kind of over your head that you're growing into. That's fine, keep that project even though I would still suggest that you get your team's support on it. But anything else, anything that your team is supposed to be doing, you give it all away. Do you not keep execution on your plate?

And you might say, *'Well, there's so much work to do. I got to take some. I can't give it all.'* You have to manage the work. That's a different podcast for a different time. And I think I've already done this podcast. I don't know about managing your time. But if there's so much work that you have to jump in and run a project, then you're not prioritizing. You're not managing the workload for your team, which is part of creating the environment.

When I say managing the workload for your team, I'm saying you need to be able to create an environment with your bosses and everyone who's asking for work to prioritize things so that they can be done during normal working hours. That might mean some deadlines need to be pushed back. That doesn't mean you'll do them, but maybe the deadlines need to be pushed back. You can only do so much.

Your job is to play gatekeeper but not like *crazy-never-lets-the-gate-open-and-says-no-to-everything gatekeeper*. What I mean by that is, as things come in, your job is to make sure that you're pushing things out. And you need to be doing that for your team, and you need to teach your team to do it. That's part of how they think too because you're going to be giving them things and they're going to be like, *'Sorry, boss. Got too much on my plate. Here's how I would reprioritize it.'* Put that expectation on them. But by not giving them the work, you're not even giving them the chance to think it through. You need to be doing high-level air cover, and you need to teach them to manage up to you as well. You need to let everything go. I don't want to see an execution project on your plate.

Once you get to the projects, a lot of these projects might be over people's heads or you might be saying, *'I don't have the quality of the team to be able to handle the project.'* And all that means is you need to spend more time coaching your team if this kind of project is over their heads. I'm going to go really high-level here and there's a lot of nuance to the art of delegation.

But the very first thing you do is set up the objectives of the project with whoever you're delegating something to. What are the objectives? What does success look like? How does it align with the overall needs of the organization? Who are the key stakeholders? You're setting up the project in the person's mind, and you're making sure they understand. Understand what's being asked. Understand what they need to deliver. And you


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might even start by asking them, *'Do you know where you would start? How do you think we should proceed? I want you to go away, and I want you to think about how you want to tackle this project and come back to me and meet with me and talk me through it.'*

Let me put it this way. As a rule, anytime you want to tell them how to do something, I want you to turn it into a question and not a question where you're just mining for the answer you want to hear. For instance, what I mean by that is, instead of saying, *'Here's how you do it…'* You could turn that into a question or an assignment and say, *'How do you think we should go about this?'* Open-ended, or *'I want to give you some time. I want you to go away. And I want you to think through the best way forward for some of the big milestones and some of the big things we need to do on this project, and come back and let's have a conversation tomorrow on it.'*

And then as they're walking through it, maybe they haven't thought of including someone or engaging somebody who might be thinking. So instead of saying, *'Did you think about engaging so and so?'* You can say things like, *'How do you think so and so would feel? Or is there a role for this department in this? I've seen a role for this department when I've done this before, what do you think about that? What do you think their role might be?'* You already have all the answers. But your job here is not to get it done fast in the beginning, it's to get them to think. Because the more you get them to think, the faster things are going to go. I promise you.

Once you have sort of an approach, you don't have to have the whole thing mapped out, Just have the next few steps mapped out, where they're going until the next milestone of the next gate or whatever it's going to be. Then you can offer up a cadence. What I mean by that is, if someone is really seasoned or an executor, you don't need to meet with them that much. You can just say, *'I only need to meet with you here and here. Come and check with me at this stage of the project and just this stage of the project or before it goes to these stakeholders.'* You get to offer up that cadence to them.

If you're delegating something that's way over what someone said, you're going to set up a cadence where you meet more often. *'Do this, let's come and chat about it… Do this, let's have this meeting... Let's come and chat about it. Let's talk about what happened.'* And through all of this, you're going to be practicing the art of asking questions. The very first thing people ask me generally speaking is, *what questions should I ask?* And the funny thing is, when you are truly coaching, you never have to think about that because the questions come naturally to you.

I could give you a list of questions to ask, but if you show up impatient, worried, frustrated, or whatever with your report, and you go through my list of questions, they are not going to land. The most important thing is your energy. If you're freaking out and angry, I don't care what you say or what question you ask, it's not going to land. But when you're calm, nurturing, curious, and you don't put pressure on everybody, like even if something's due Friday, and it's Thursday, adding pressure and impatience isn't going to make it better. It isn't going to make the end product better. When you're calm and nurturing, and you help people think things through, and you create a calming, nurturing shadow umbrella, you inspire people to think.

I know it's hard to do, but that's what makes a great leader. This is about practice in those situations. When you are calm and nurturing, and you're focused on helping the person think and focusing on them and not what they're doing, then the questions come naturally. Because some people will say, *'Well, did you do this? Did you do this? Did you do that?'* Those aren't questions, that's a checklist. What you want to get to is, *'Tell me what you were thinking here. What was your goal with this? What do you think the outcomes would be? How do you think so*


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*and so would feel about that? How does that solution get you closer to your goal? I'm seeing the possibility of something like this happening, what do you think about that?'*

Obviously, they're not going to see the things that you see because you've been around the block more than them. Your job is to point things out and ask them what they think. *'I think this could happen. I think this person might freak out about that because of this, this, and this. What do you think about that?'* They might go, *'Yeah, I thought of that so I'm going to do this.'* They might go, *'Oh my God, I never thought of that. Thank you for that.'* If they just agree with you, and they go, *'Yeah, thanks. Sure. I'll add them to the list,'* you need to stop them. And you need to say, *'Tell me why you agree with me. Tell me why you want to add that to the list of things to do.'* You want them to think it through. You don't want people to do things just because you're the boss. That is a very top line in the art of delegation.

It really is an art about helping your team get results. And being a coaching leader is about helping people think, not leading them to the answers you want, but asking the questions that you would ask yourself, or that you would automatically be answering in your own head. Because now you're so seasoned, you just think, *'I'm going to go see this person, this person, this person, this person. I need to make sure these people are aligned.'* You're just going right to the solution. But instead of just going right to the solution, I need to make sure these people are aligned. The question becomes to your report, what people do you think we need to get aligned on this? Who needs to be involved? So turn your solutions into open-ended questions.

I know a lot of people who ask very leading questions like, *'I think we should align, so and so and so and so, what do you think about that?'* That's not an open-ended question. There's an art to this. But the idea is, you'll know you're doing it well when you are just trying to help people think. You'll know that you're putting pressure and you're controlling when you're giving them the answers and just saying, *'I think we should do this. What do you think about that?'* That's different than saying, *'I see this as an opportunity because these people have traditionally acted this way. How do you see it?'* That's a different way of saying, *what do you think about that?* Versus *I want to do this, what do you think about that?*

I think you get me. I think you could feel the difference when you're doing it. Delegation is a key thing. Your value equation has shifted. You are in true belief that your way is actually not better. You are practicing the art of getting results through your team delegation, the art of getting results to your team.

The last thing I want to offer you is you need to trust yourself that you will figure this out. You will make a lot of mistakes as you learn to migrate from the doer to the leader. You figured out a lot of shit in your career, you will figure this out too. I know you think, *the stakes are so much higher, I can't make a mistake like I used to. People aren't giving me as much leeway anymore.* Maybe that's true, but they're not as high as you think they are. You're allowed to make mistakes. Even if people are telling you that you're not allowed to make mistakes, you are. That's their hang-up, not yours.

If they're saying, *'Oh, you got to prove yourself;'* that's their hang-up, not yours. Don't take on other people's shit. You just show up as the best leader you can be based on the strategy that you're aligning to on who you want to become as a leader. Sometimes you need to manage expectations when things go sideways. You need to go and talk things through. You need to solve things with your team. That's okay. It's your job to manage up. It's your job to manage the noise. You can do that. But you don't have to stop trusting yourself. You can say, *'No matter what happens, I can figure this out. I can fix any mistake. I can make anything work. I know how to manage up. I know how to keep the stakeholders alerted. I know how to see when the shit's about to hit the fan. I know how to build trust with my team. I will figure this out even if I screw things up once in a while.'* Because you basically have


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screwed your way up to this point in your career. You will continue doing it that way to whatever success you want to create in your career.

My friends, that is what I have for you this week. Let go of overmanaging. It will not save you, it will only hurt you. 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.*

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