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HOW DO I GET MY TEAM MEMBERS TO GET ALONG?

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. This week, we're talking about how to get your team members to get along. This can be a big distraction for a lot of people because first of all, there's always going to be conflict between your team members. Because they're human beings, there's just going to be conflict. But what happens with a lot of leaders is they consider the conflicts a distraction. They just want everyone to be an adult, get the work done, just get along, and leave all the bullshit, human distractions, insecurities, and whatever it is out of the office environment. Mostly, leaders just don't really want to deal with this shit. Let's be honest.

They handle it in different ways. Sometimes they ignore it. Sometimes they say something I heard at McDonald's a lot, which always drove me crazy. It is *'You're adults, you figure it out,'* which sort of says that being an adult means you know how to deal with conflict, which is such crap because if we as adults could figure out how to deal with conflict, we wouldn't have war. We wouldn't be facing this political uncertainty that we all are facing in the world. We wouldn't get divorced. I'm not sure exactly who said being an adult means you can deal with conflict, but that's a load of crap. I think just expecting people to figure it out on their own is just going to cause more problems, and oftentimes these things can fester.

I have a philosophy that I stole from McDonald's, which has nothing to do with conflict resolution because I have to promise you that there were a lot of people who didn't know how to deal with conflict resolution at McDonald's, and me being one sometimes. The philosophy that I'm stealing from McDonald's to bring to you is something that they call *'Clean As You Go (CLAYGO).' Clean as you go* is a restaurant philosophy, which means, if you're working in the kitchen at a McDonald's restaurant, the idea is that when there's a mess, spills on the ground, spills on the counter, or whatever, you just clean as you go. You don't just let the mess continue to grow and then clean it up all at once.

I do it in my house too. I just clean as I go. When I'm cooking, I just put the pots, pans, knives, and whatever I'm using in the dishwasher as I go. And I love that philosophy in the context of relationships too, which for me, basically means you clean up the relationship as you go so you don't let things fester. You don't let things sit. Sometimes you let things go if there's not really a big deal. But if something perpetuates, you just nip it in the

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bud. You need to deal with it because relationship drama can quickly turn into a much bigger relationship drama if you just let things go.

I think the benefit of actually doing this like taking the decision to say, "*I'm going to deal with conflict, I'm going to get involved somehow, or I'm going to deal with conflict resolution on my team,"* is you can use all of this relationship development as a way to help elevate your team's ability to think through problems. You can use it as a not just, *"Oh, I've got to get these people to get along."* But *"How can I use this situation to help my people become stronger, more emotionally intelligent and critical-thinking team members?"*

I think cleaning as you go and nipping things in the bud, not only helps you avoid bigger problems later but also helps you grow stronger, more emotionally intelligent people on your team. If you have a couple of people on your team who aren't getting along, work in different ways, or don't appreciate each other, then it's your job as a leader to help them figure it out.

What I want to talk about today is helping you manage potential conflict situations on your team so that instead of them being left to fester and become bigger problems, you use those conflict situations to grow deeper connections and stronger leaders on your team. I think the overarching message I want to send is that you as a leader, can create a culture of feedback and discussion and openness on your team. I talked about culture development a couple of episodes ago on a podcast episode I did called Building High-performing Leaders or Building a High-performing Team, or something like that.

But the most important thing that I want to share with you about that right now is to remember that as the leader of your team, you are a thermostat. You set the tone. If you ignore situations, they're going to ignore situations. If you deal with situations, they're going to learn to start to deal with situations. So if you create a culture of open dialogue, communication, and feedback on your team, and there's a way to do it that makes sense, then your team members are going to be more apt to do it.

If you create a *Clean As You Go* culture on your team, and you as a team define what that looks like, then your team's going to start to operate that way. You get to lead all of that. But I have four rules, steps, and considerations, let's call them for you to follow as you're dealing with these. I would hesitate to call them conflict situations, but for argument's sake, call them complex situations on your team.

The first thing that I want to say to you is you have to accept this as part of your job. It's not a distraction. It's not something that's getting in the way of getting the job done. It actually is one of the steps to getting the job done. I think the challenge is, we often think of if you're running a project, getting from point A to point B, there are all these task steps to do, but they're all in relationship to the tactical steps, the work back steps to getting the project done.

But we forget to realize that there are human steps as part of the to-do list, like talking to people, checking up on them, giving them feedback, helping them get through the discomfort, you yourself learning to calm down, and helping them solve conflicts, disagreements, or collab. There are all these human steps that go along with getting the tactical steps done.

I want you to realize that your role as a leader isn't status report management. Your job isn't to say, *"Here's what's happening this week."* Your bigger job beyond making sure things are being executed, is to make sure that the people who are executing them are growing as leaders. And that requires you to get dirty sometimes. You have to get your hands dirty in terms of helping them sort out the emotional dramas that can come up along the way.

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And they will come up even though we're adults because so many of us don't know how to deal with our own emotions.

It's going to come up. We're insecure, we're defensive, we're competitive, we're protective–all those things get in the way. So when it happens, no eye rolls. No *'Oh my god, this is a distraction. Oh my god, can't these people figure it out?'* I want you to think about it like the thought in your mind should be, *'Of course, this is happening. I'm dealing with people. I'm dealing with human people whose performance and sense of value are on the line. Of course, I'm going to have to deal with this stuff.'* And accept that it's part of your job to get involved with these things and to support your team through these things.

You accepting that as part of your job as a leader is going to give you such a sense of relief, not because you know how to do it and you're fine at it because that's going to maybe fill you with some anxiety, but more so, I would say you accepting that this is part of your job is you're not going to feel stressed when it happens. You're not going to be surprised. You're not going to think it's not normal. You're not going to wish it wasn't there. You're just going to go, *'Oh yeah. Of course, it's here, and now I got to get in here and learn to deal with it.'* Learning to deal with it is just a skill set. And you've learned lots and lots of skill sets. As I always say, you can do this. You just have to put your mind to wanting to do this, and you'll figure it out because you're smart enough to figure stuff out. That's how you got here in the first place.

So the first thing is, just accept it as part of the job. You're dealing with human beings, and human beings are emotionally imperfect. Number two, set some ground rules. When I say this, I mean for yourself, not necessarily for them. The reason for that is, when it comes to this kind of stuff, you can't just set rules for people that they haven't agreed to or they haven't come up with themselves because then they feel even more debilitated. That's the right word I'm trying to think of if they feel like they're in an even smaller box and they're not allowed to be themselves, so they don't feel safe anymore because maybe they have to follow rules.

If there ever are going to be some team cultural norms that you guys develop with each other, it has to be set up so that people can interpret those cultural norms based on what they need. Like, for instance, a cultural norm could be, we create safety for each other. Not necessarily how to create safety, but the idea that we create safety for each other could be a cultural norm. And you can give some examples to your team of how they do that, creating safety. They might have examples that they want to share, but the idea is that we create safety for each other. We don't put each other in harm's way, for instance. I'm just making that up.

I like the whole safety thing a lot. Creating safety for someone helps them be more vulnerable. And you guys have to agree on what safety looks like. But when it comes to setting ground rules for yourself, I always try to think of it like I set ground rules for what I think is the kind of behaviour that I expect from people. One of the things that I think is really important for leaders is taking accountability for their own feelings. I don't say to everyone, *"Hey, you need to take accountability for your own feelings."* But I personally expect that leaders are taking accountability for their own feelings.

As we all know, as human beings, we're not walking around in our leadership mode all the time. Sometimes we're like whiny adults. We all get there. So we'll say things like *"They made me feel angry. They did this, and it made me feel attacked, or something like that."* And what we do is we blame other people for how we feel. We blame situations for how we feel. *"I was too intimidated by what they said to say anything in the meeting."*

It's good to know these things—that they felt attacked or they felt scared or they felt intimidated. But when you're faced with this and your report or employee is saying these things, that's when you really need to go into coach

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leader mode and get curious and say, *"Of course, I understand why you might have felt attacked when this person said this thing. But is it true they were attacking you?"* You need to get them to question their responses. *"What were you thinking that made you feel attacked? Is it true?"* You have to question that thought, whatever it was.

Let's say their thought was *'They're trying to make me look bad in front of a group.'* What you might ask the person is, *"Is that true? Is that the only truth here—that they were trying to make you look bad?"* Could it be that they just had a really strong opinion and they didn't feel listened to, or maybe they were feeling insecure, or maybe whatever? You need to help expand your people's minds to see that their interpretation of a situation is not the only possible interpretation and that the interpretation that they've chosen—I'm not saying that what they chose is wrong—but it doesn't have to be true, and it's not the only truth.

When something's not the only truth, there are other ways to look at things. That alone helps them see that maybe even though their initial reaction wasn't wrong, it may not also be right. You know what I'm saying? That sometimes takes the ouch out of situations. It takes the hurt out of situations when people see that maybe they have a hand in creating a bit of the drama that is being created. It also helps people feel more in control and realize that they're accountable for their feelings, which is very powerful.

At first, it can feel like, oh my god, overwhelming. But then it's like, *'Wait a minute. I'm in control of how I feel about things. I'm in control of how I think about things. Wow, that actually is quite a freedom. I can actually have less stress because I don't have to feel this way.'* And if you're a great coach, then you can help people see how what they're thinking is driving their feelings and their actions in a situation. You can really slow things down to help people see themselves.

That's where one of my rules is when I'm dealing with people. I really like for them to see how they're behaving how they're accountable for their behaviour and how they're feeling right now. That doesn't mean I want to make them wrong for their initial reactions. Their initial reactions are normal human reactions. And also, their own accountability is not the only way to handle a situation. You need to figure out for yourself what some of those basic expectations or ground rules, if you will, for how you want people to behave or take accountability for on your team. Again, you don't have to share those things. It's just how you are constantly guiding people. You have to have your own strategy for that.

Number one, accept it as part of the job. Accept dealing with team dynamics as part of the job. Number two, have your own set of guiding principles. Maybe that's a better way to say it for these team dynamics. Number three, you have to walk the line between facilitating and ingratiating. Don't get in the middle. When I say that, that doesn't mean don't get involved. Your job is to facilitate the discussion, not ingratiate yourself into the middle of these two people. You don't ignore it, but you don't take sides. You don't try to solve it for them.

Your job is to facilitate the discussion, meaning bring it out in the open, create the safety, get them talking, and ask questions. You might be thinking, *"I will become a facilitator. I won't take sides, but how do I start the facilitation process?"* And I think the most important thing to remember is it's not just one meeting or one thing that you say. You might need to have several conversations and say things 20 different ways. And maybe the first time you try to resolve conflict with a couple of people, like, let's just say there are two people that are constantly butting heads with each other over and over and over again, you might try it once and get a little bit of a ways forward. Get some success, but not everything's fixed. You might have to do it in 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 time situations. And each time, if things get a little bit better, a little bit better.

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The very first thing is, this isn't a one-and-done. Just like anything else, it takes time with people to create new behaviours. Your job is to just keep serving up different ways of looking at things, and different ways of thinking about things, and creating safety to have different kinds of conversations so that people can learn, and give them the space to have that click, have that switch of mindset, which sometimes takes longer for some people. But that's okay like you got to keep going at it.

Eventually, there's going to be a situation where you need to stop going for it and stop trying to help these people. I'm not going to get into all of that today. But certainly, you don't make that decision after the first time or the second time. Maybe you're going to try it 10 times, 10 different ways of doing it. And if you are going to try it 10 times, don't try the same way every time, because that's the definition of insanity. You might bring the people together, but you might say different things. You might try different ways. Just remember that it's not just a one-and-done.

The other thing to remember is just because you want people to get along, you ask questions, and you create safety doesn't mean that they're going to be forthright and honest about what's going on with them the first go. That doesn't mean they're going to want to work through this. Your job, as well as a leader, is to make them understand that they are responsible for creating a good relationship together. That is part of their job—to work well together. They don't have to love each other, they don't have to hang out together after work, but they have to have a collaborative, functioning, working relationship. That is their responsibility as leaders on your team.

You're going to help them figure it out, but that is their responsibility in making this work, being committed to making this relationship work. That, in itself, might just be a dialogue that you have to have with them. That might just be one of the conversations. You just saying, *"Hey, it's your responsibility to be leaders and develop a strong working relationship"* doesn't make it so. You might say that statement and say, *"What do you think about that? Do you think it's your responsibility to figure this out together? Do you think it's your responsibility as leaders to find a way to work together?"*

You need to get agreement on that statement, because if you say it and then go on to the other thing, they're just going to have their own thoughts about it, like, *"Yeah, but they're assholes, so I'm not going to work with them."* They're not going to go to their best selves the minute you say that. You have to bring it out. And you do that by saying, *"What do you think about that statement? Do you buy into that statement? Do you think it's your responsibility?"* You have to bring them in on it and get them to decide for themselves that they want to agree to that objective.

And of course, down the road, if they're not following through, if they're not actually working on it in good faith, then they need to understand the consequences of their actions. That has to be a one-on-one conversation. You might have to bring people back in if they go astray. You have to keep that in mind. The first thing is to agree to an objective of what you're trying to achieve here, which is not solving the specific conflict, but the bigger picture of them learning to be leaders that get along effectively. Even if it's just a one-off situation, I think it's important to get a bigger picture than just the situation in front of you.

Then it's your job as a leader to create safety. Why are you here, leader? It's more like whatever you need to say. *"We need to talk about this. We've talked about what happened and used what's happened as an example of how we want to work better together in the future. I want you to know that my role here is to facilitate this dialogue. I'm not going to take sides, because here's what I think is great about you, and here's what I think is great about you,*

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and I want both of you on my team, so that's non-negotiable for me at this moment." Maybe you don't add *"at this moment."*

Whatever they need to do is feel safe, and you just ask them to talk about what happened from their perspective. You can see if they're being honest. You can see if they're being inflammatory. If someone's blaming the other person right in the room, you can stop them and say, *"One of the things that we need to do here is not blame the other person. Let's think about what happened. What were you thinking? What were you thinking when this happened? Why were you thinking that way? Was that the only way to be thinking?"*

And you can also go to the other person and say, *"What were you thinking when you did that at that moment?"* Create more awareness of their thinking. The more that they get awareness of their thinking, the more they're going to, in the future, ask themselves, *what was I thinking? What am I thinking right now? Why am I doing this? Why do I feel anxious? Why do I need to get this off my chest in this moment?* They're going to start questioning themselves eventually, ahead of time.

But for the beginning, we need to create sort of post-scenario awareness of what they're thinking so that they can learn to question that thinking for themselves. This is kind of a longer process. First, this post-scenario awareness, then we can start to create more during-scenario awareness, and then eventually people get to a place where they can stop themselves ahead of time, where they can question themselves ahead of time, and get themselves into a better place ahead of time. But it takes some time to get there.

You might not really get all of that out in the first conversation. You might try to get some of it out. You might see that it's not working. And you might say, *"You guys, I'm going to call this discussion, because I don't feel like we're moving forward in this discussion. What I'm going to do is meet with you individually, and I'm going to help you work through your role in this situation individually, and then we're going to come back together and have this conversation again."* So that they understand that this isn't about, *"Oh, I'm going to talk to each of you individually so that I can listen to you complain about each other behind each other's backs and fight for your point of view. That's not what we're trying to create here. We're trying to create this thing where I'm going to help you see your role in this conflict, and then we're going to come back together and have a bigger conversation."*

There's nothing wrong with calling it if what you're trying isn't working, and then saying, *"But we're not going to give up."* In your own mind, *"What's the next step? Here's what we're going to do here."* If you do have individual conversations with each person, just make sure that they understand this is not an opportunity for them to sit around and complain about the other person and blame circumstances and not take accountability. This is about you and that person sitting down and talking about their role and what's happening and how they want their role as a leader to evolve in the future, same with the other person.

Through these scenarios and these conversations, you're going to hear things about the other person. In each conversation, you're going to hear things about the other person that you're not going to love—that they said, or that they did, or some sort of behaviour. It's going to be really important that as a leader, you don't take sides. You don't say, *"Well, that wasn't the best for them to do that."* or *"I'll talk to them about that."* You don't want to do that because everybody makes mistakes.

Everybody does things that are maybe reacting from their insecurity, or just not knowing any better, or whatever it is. You can talk to the person about it when the time comes if it comes up in your conversation with them. You can even say things like, *"One of the things that I was made aware of is that you said this, did you? Why did you?*

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What came up for you?" You want to get curious and help the person through that, not judge them because of it. It's really important for you as a leader to not take sides, not judge, and not make reactions to what the other people are saying, like what the person in front of you is saying about the other person. You are always bringing the person in front of you back to their role, what they did, and how they want to change things in the future.

In coaching, we call this staying out of the pool, meaning, if someone is drowning in a pool, you want to be able to throw them a life raft and help them, like, pull them out of the pool. But if you get in the pool with them, you're at risk of drowning too, like you have less leverage to help them when you're in the water.

A better analogy, I think, is when let's say, someone falls into a hole. If you fall in the hole too, now you're both in the hole. It's hard for you to get out. Your job is to stay out of the hole, which in this case is their feelings about the other person. You need to stay out of the hole, stay out of the pool. You need to be able to throw the rope down the hole and pull them out. You need to be neutral. That's really the key thing here, is you need to be neutral when you are coaching someone through conflict. That's the third thing, is really make sure that you are not getting in the middle, that you're facilitating, not ingratiating yourself into the situation, not taking sides, and keep trying over and over again. This is not a one-and-done situation.

The last thing is to make sure you have follow-ups. You might have had the most amazing feedback conversation or conflict resolution conversation between two people or even one person, that's great. Congratulations. That's really a big deal, and I would still follow up. *How is it going? How are you feeling today? How are you feeling after our conversation? What came up for you after our conversation? What realizations did you have? What other things do you think you want to try? How else can I help you with this?* That sort of thing.

Again, you can bring them together to have this conversation. You can have that individually with them, based on the situation. But you always want to be following up because you want them to know that this is serious. This is important. This is part of the job for them to be getting along together. You want to be careful because if you're going to lead them to places that are difficult for them to talk about, that is a bit vulnerable for them, and if you come on too strong, they're not going to come to you in the future.

You do have to create some safety and demonstrate to them that you are on their side, both of their sides equally. And no matter what comes up, it's not going to impact your belief in them. You're not going to judge them. Your role is to help them learn to be more intentional, thoughtful, and emotionally intelligent leaders, and that's just part of the growth of the skill set. There's nothing wrong with being insecure sometimes acting out on the insecurity, or maybe not being your most professional self. It's all okay, as long as you set a goal for yourself to work through it and try harder.

As long as you're always trying to become more emotionally intelligent and focused and getting along, or whatever the goals are that you're setting for them, as long as you're always trying to do that, you can let them know you're always going to be there for them. You're not going to judge them. That's going to be an important piece too, is that you're always creating safety so that they don't stop coming to you.

That's what I have for you this week. Still 30 minutes. I don't know what it is. I'm really trying to get it underneath. Apparently, I'm not trying hard enough. I need to try harder. My friends, that's what I have for you. See you in a few weeks. Talk to you soon. Bye for now.

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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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