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HOW LEADERS CAN WORK 40 HOURS A WEEK

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.

Hello, leaders. Welcome back to the podcast. Today, we're talking about something that is near and dear to my heart, and that is how to be successful in corporate without overworking. I know a lot of you out there are overworking because we think that we need to. We think it sort of comes with when you are in corporate: you have to work the extra hours to be seen, to get ahead, which is kind of a little bit what happens at the more junior levels. And we're worried, too, that people will think that we're uncommitted to the job and that we don't want to put in the extra, so to speak.

We want to make sure that people know that we are committed and accountable for what we do, and sometimes we think it comes with the title. I can't tell you how many people come to me and say, *"Well, I'm not sure I want to be in the C-suite or in senior management, because they work so hard, and I don't know if I want to do that many hours."*

What I want to offer you is that you can be excellent at your job. You can be a highly valued leader at 40 hours a week. You can be successful at 40 hours a week. You can be good at your job at 40 hours a week. That doesn't mean that on occasion when something is super on fire, you don't put in a little extra. But that should be the exception, not the rule. The rule should be: you have your shit together, and you know how to manage the workload and get everything done and be a great leader in 40-*ish* hours a week.

I think that it's really hard for people to do that now because the meeting culture is so heavy. We're on Zoom all the time. We're having meetings all the time, or we're working remotely, or part of the team is remote, so your calendar is booked back-to-back with conversations that you actually have to book now, versus just having them in the hallway as you pass somebody, *"Hey can you just give me this?"* or whatever. You keep having these meetings, or you're constantly reading your chat or whatever it is, and so it feels like it's really impossible to get anything done because you're constantly in these conversations or in meetings, etc., having meetings about meetings, or whatever it is. I get it.

What I want to offer you is that when you become a leader, it is so important that you are not operating in this frantic, working-all-the-time energy. One, because you will burn out—you can't sustain that—but also it sets the

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wrong example for you as a brand and for your team overall. Because you might be thinking, *"You know what, I need to work because it comes with a title, and people will think I'm not committed and that I need to do this."* But what it also says about you when you're overworking is that you can't handle your shit.

I remember, and believe me, I am the overworking queen. I did it for years and years, but I remember being the last person at the office all the time. And that does not make me a martyr. That makes me someone who couldn't get all my work done in the day. This makes me someone who didn't know how to prioritize, didn't know how to say no, didn't know how to push back effectively, or influenced decisions in a way where I wouldn't have to do all the things right away all the time.

I wasn't always great at that. I would have to overwork because of it, and then I would burn out and not be as great at my job. I've been through this cycle so many times. I know what I'm talking about here. And I have learned how to break the cycle from the standpoint of a leader. I think how you break the cycle at different levels is different, and when you're a leader, it's even more important that you set the right example.

One of the other things I wanted to say too before I get into what we're going to cover today is that oftentimes people will work extra because they want to get promoted, and they don't think they can get promoted without working all the hours. That's one of the things that comes up a lot with my clients as well, and it certainly was in my own head as I was working all the hours.

But what I want to offer you, in terms of getting promoted, is this. At the leadership level, the work that you do is table stakes. You just have to be good at your job. But if you're someone who can't be good at their job in a reasonable amount of time, you're not going to get promoted as a leader, because that's not normally the kind of culture that people want to advocate for. You don't want your team working all the hours all the time. You don't want to have someone as a leader who can't prioritize their life, so you really have to be careful about the message that you're sending to your brand.

I do a lot of work on personal branding and creating your personal marketing plan, that sort of thing, with clients all the time. What messages do you want to send about yourself on purpose around you? I'm going to offer you that you don't want to send the message that it takes you way too much time to get your work done. Yes, you want to be someone who's dependable and accountable, but that doesn't mean you have to work all the hours. That just means you have to step in when something's in crisis mode, or you have to figure out how to strategically reprioritize things so that you can get it done right.

That's what we want with our leaders—leaders who can think through what's happening, motivate their team, keep them focused on the most important things, manage up the organization, and all of that kind of stuff. That's what we want to be as leaders when it comes to the workload. We don't want leaders who are working 60 hours a week, the last person in the office, burning themselves out. That's not the role model most companies want to send to the rest of the company. You may have been rewarded for that when you were an individual contributor, but you're not going to be rewarded for that as a leader.

What I'm going to focus on today is how to become a great leader by managing your time better and ideally being able to get it all done in 40-ish hours a week Think about it: if you had two people you were going to hire, both were good at their job, but one was good at it in 60 hours a week and one was good at it in 40 hours a week; one was burning out, and one was calm and focused; one was kind of encouraging everyone else to do the same

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by role modelling a 60-hour-a-week behaviour, and one was encouraging people to think strategically and get it done in an effective amount of time—which one would you hire? That's what we're going to cover today.

We're going to talk about it, and I'm going to try and do it in my allocated 20 minutes, although I've been talking too much. Before I start, I just want to let you know that everything I'm going to talk about today and more is available in my little starter DIY course called *Time Savvy Leaders*, which you can get at melsavage.com/time. In that course, I'm going to talk about what I talk about today and more than that, and actually help you work through it with videos and a workbook. You don't get me one-on-one live, but you get me in video form and kind of work through how to set your strategy as a leader for working 40 hours a week, and how to implement that strategy effectively.

My goal in this course is that in 30 days, you've got yourself down to 40 hours a week. So if that's something interesting to you, please go to melsavage.com/time and sign up. It's only $97. It's just a starter course, but it is really great value for $97. Whenever I do something or create something for any of my clients, my goal is always to 10x the value versus price. Even though it's $97, I put $1,000 of value into this program. So I suggest you go and check that out.

Because what I want for you is that you can lead with ease. You don't burn yourself out. You can get things done effectively in 40 hours a week so that you have a clear head. And when you have a clear head, when you've had rest, when you're not working all the time, you make better decisions, plus you have time to work on your own leadership brand. A lot of people come to me and say, *"I'm just working all the time… I have no time to work on my own personal and professional development."* You need time for that. And the more you spend time working on your professional development, the faster you're going to get ahead.

So we need to make time for those things, and ideally, I'd love for you to be seen as that calm, effective leader who can handle anything. You can tweak that description any way you like, but think about it. Think about the most effective leaders. They are the ones who never lose their cool, who are always calm in the face of chaos, who create the right energy for everyone to do their work, who don't see anything as a problem, and who think everything is solvable. That's a great leader to maybe target yourself to. And then you can sort of tweak your own version of that, what that looks like in your authentic way to make that work.

Let's get to the solutions, and the first one for a leader, because I like to ground everything in strategy, is really defining what you want your role to be with time. What do you want your role to be with time? What do I mean by that? We often, as human beings, just use time as a tool. So we don't ever think about, *"Oh, how do I want to effectively be with time as a leader? How should I be using my time? How is time a tool to be a leader."* We just kind of use it to get the stuff done. We don't think about it beyond that, generally speaking.

But what I want to offer you is that overworking is a mid-management strategy. I actually even call it, and I'll apologize for this upfront, I often call it kind of the lazy way out because it's harder sometimes to think strategically, push back, and help people reprioritize than it is just to throw hours at something, which we used to do when we were junior. But now that you're a leader, you have to rethink, like, usually when you're junior, but when you're an individual contributor, overworking is your number one only success strategy.

What we want to be able to do as a leader is really broaden our success strategies. We have to. And now we want to figure out how we want to use time effectively as a leader so that we can be successful. I want you to really think about what that could look like. As a leader, what's my role with time? One of the things I often say to

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people is, *"Well, one of them is to own your time."* Sometimes we think our time is happening to us, like we don't have enough time, and there's never enough time. *"Oh, how are you today?" "Oh, I'm so busy."*

We think time is happening to us versus being the decider. *"I got eight hours today, what am I going to do with it?"* We don't think that we're in control of it, but you are. It's just sometimes harder to get out of things, or we prioritize things, but you can. You're a leader, and you must. So owning your time. If you decide to work extra, it's because you've decided to, not because you have to. If you don't go to a meeting, it's because you decided not to go. If you do go to a meeting, it's because you decided to go. You take ownership of everything you decide to do in those eight hours a day. That is very powerful because then you can always have enough time to do things,

I always say to myself, *"There's always enough time because I get to decide what I'm making time for."* I get to decide what I'm going to push back and make happen. Now you might say, *"Well, I don't get that. I don't have the authority to push things back. My boss doesn't let me do any of that."* I understand that fear, and I understand that sense of feeling trapped. But let me offer you this, and I say this with love. Have you tried everything? And have you tried everything, like 10 different ways to make this work? One of the things I offer my clients all the time is the reason that you're working all the extra hours is because that's on the table all the time.

When you go to your boss and say, *"Hey, you know what, we don't have time to do all this stuff, so I can push these things back, or I can do this a little less in the level of detail that you're looking for, or maybe we can sort of pull this person into the team to get this thing done over the course of the next couple of days,"* and they say, *"No, no, no, no, no,"* it's because one of the things you're keeping on the table is the fact that you will work extra, or your team will work extra to get it done.

What if that wasn't one of the choices on the table? What if you removed that option? They can't force you to work extra. Now, you might think, *"Well, they can't force me, but they might think I'm not committed, and then they might fire me or something like that."* I understand that concern as well. But how do you want to handle that? If you're going to work the extra hours, you need to own that and understand why. I'm going to work the extra hours because I'm afraid of getting fired. You get to own that decision, or you could find another way if you don't want to work the extra hours.

Some strategies that have worked for some people are things like going back to your boss and saying, *"So, are you saying to me that you just want everyone to work the extra hours? I'm okay with that in special circumstances, but it can't be all the time. Do you agree with that, boss? Do you agree with the strategy that we can't always be working all the extra hours? So moving forward then, maybe we do it this time, but can we agree that moving forward, we're going to start to prioritize and really invest those extra hours only when there's a fire?"*

If you need to start planting seeds, you need to start creating the narrative and the culture with your boss and in your environment. And if you still say to me, *"Well, that's just impossible here,"* one, it sounds to me like you're not willing to try different things, or two, you're in the wrong environment. And if you continue to stay, remember, that's a choice too. No matter what you do, you want to own your choices, particularly around time. And that's really what I'm saying more than anything else. When you want to define your role with time, one of the things is owning it.

In the course that I'm suggesting, I give you lots of other ideas too on things that you can add to your role of time. But I think it really all starts with owning it, and some of the other roles you can have with it are how you

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strategize it, how you build a culture around it, how you manage up with it, and all different kinds of things that you can decide what it looks like for you. I go through that in the program.

The first thing you need to do is define your role with leading time. Number two: now you have to set a goal. you have to set a goal for how many hours a week you want to work. I've talked about this before, but this idea is that we just work, generally speaking, from the bottom up, meaning we work enough hours to get it all done. Whatever that looks like—some weeks, it's 40; some weeks, it's 50; some weeks, it's more. We just work whatever it takes to get the work done. If you keep up with that bottom-up approach, then you're always going to be working based on the work that comes down.

What I want to offer you is when you own your time, when you take a leadership role with time, you set a goal and you work top-down. So if your goal is 40 hours a week, now you've got to figure out what you're going to do in those 40 hours to get the work done. It forces you to be so much more strategic with where you spend your time. It really forces you to use time as your most valuable asset, versus something that you just throw at stuff whenever you need to. So you need to set a goal and use it top-down.

Again, what I mean by that is if my goal is 40 hours, what am I going to spend it on? You might say, *"Oh, but there are always these surprises. I'll plan my whole week out, and then this surprise happens."* Well, if there are always surprises, put time aside for surprises.

In the program, what I do is break it down into how much time is focused on various things, including personal development and all that kind of stuff, so that you can at least have sort of sub-goals to the goal on how much time you spend on certain things, like how much time you spend in meetings in a week. I know so many folks say, *"Well, I'm in meetings eight hours a day, and I have to do my work after work."* Well, if you can't get your work done during the day, then you're in too many meetings.

So the very first thing you need to do is figure out, first of all, what you are calling a meeting. Is a quick catch-up with one of your reports, talking about how to get the work done, a meeting? Or is that just a one-on-one, talking about workflow, delegating, mentoring them, or whatever? So what is a meeting? And then, of the meetings, which ones do you not need to go to, and which ones can you delegate? Which meetings are you attending that no one needs to go to? Which ones could someone else cover for you and provide a summary afterward? Which meetings are you going to just to sit there?

One of the rules I have is if you're going to a meeting and doing your emails, writing a presentation, or doing other work during the meeting, then you don't need to be in that meeting. If you say, *"Well, I just need to be seen there,"* then pre-manage that: *"I'm not going, here's why, and here's how we're going to catch up. I think it's more important that I do this work, XYZ."* You have to learn to manage up the organization—up, down, and across—so you can create space for yourself. You're a leader now, and you need to decide what's important and create the space to get it done.

When you use a top-down time management strategy, it forces you to make tough decisions. Decisions that aren't going to make everyone happy but are in the best interest of the work—and you. Let's not forget you; taking care of yourself is in the best interest of the work.

Number one, define your role with time.

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Number two, you have to set a goal so you can work top-down. How many hours a week do you want to work?

Number three, you need to create some new boundaries for yourself. Boundaries, I want to remind you, are not what you tell other people. Boundaries aren't like, *"Boss, you can't text me after 8 p.m.,"* or, *"Hey, everybody, I'm leaving at four or five o'clock every day, so I don't care."* That's not a boundary. *"Don't bother me after five"* is not a boundary. A boundary is what you will do when other people do things.

So when your boss texts you after 8 p.m. at night, what will your boundary be? For example, you might decide, *"I don't text back,"* or, *"I'll tell them I'll get back to them in the morning."* What will your boundary be when someone calls you with an emergency after you've left the office? What do you do when someone tries to interrupt your focus time and asks you to do something? You need to figure out what your boundaries are in situations that keep coming up.

Everyone's life is different, and there will always be different patterns in your work environment that consistently interrupt your workflow or go against your overall strategy. Don't be mad at it; don't be mad that all these things are happening. You need to learn to handle them. You need to decide what your strategy is to handle those things. Sometimes they can be proactive strategies, and sometimes they are reactive strategies.

A reactive strategy would be: *"When my boss texts me after 8 p.m., here's how I will react; here's what I will do."* And sometimes they're proactive, meaning when someone comes and offers you a last-minute project, one thing you can do is question everything. For instance, if someone says to you, *"Oh, yeah, this project needs to be done by 5 o'clock today. It's the most important thing ever, and we have to get it to the C-suite chief by 5 o'clock."*

Fine, but I would question it: *"Do we really need to go into all of this detail? Does it really need to be done by 5? What are they going to do with it at 5 o'clock? Will they read it this weekend? Can I get it to them by Monday morning? What's the difference between 5 o'clock tonight on a Friday and noon on a Monday? Can we stretch it? Can we provide an initial element of it and deliver the rest next week?"*

You want to see if you can break it down—just question everything. And part of that can also be like, *"So we have this other thing that we're doing. Are you okay if that gets delivered on Monday?*" You have to make sure that you're questioning all the asks and the parameters. Because you know what? Eight times out of ten—I'm going to say eight instead of nine times out of ten—people get stuff and then don't look at it. So buy yourself time where you can. Sometimes you cannot, but most of the time you can.

And it's not just about pushing deadlines or getting more help. It can involve breaking the project down, not finishing it at a 10 out of 10 in quality, or saying, *"How about if I just give you bullet points instead of putting it into a deck?" "How about If I just do this part upfront, and then the rest comes later?"* You get to decide how you put things forward. You can also create boundaries within your team as part of fostering a healthy team culture. What are the team's boundaries? How do we work together to proactively and reactively manage our time?

The one thing I wanted to say about proactively managing your time as well is, I don't mean by, again, I just want to reinforce this, it isn't about you telling people what they can and cannot do. Proactively managing your time too can be about how you will handle it, having a plan ahead of time and how you will handle things. Proactively managing your time, for instance, is leaving two or three hours a week open for surprises. If surprises always come on a Thursday for a Friday, make sure you leave time for that. All right, notice the patterns, get ahead of it, and how you proactively manage your time.

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Some of these things I'm sharing with you right now are part of the nine fundamentals that I give in my program for how you can implement your overall time strategy to make it work for you. I know I'm already over my 20-minute mark, so I'm going to end it there. But I think the key thing that I want you to take away is that now that you're a leader, your job is to lead your time, not just to use it as a commodity that you know helps you get all the work done that's coming at you, but learning to use it as an asset, as your most valuable asset, and treat it like the most valuable asset you have that you need to lead so that you can get the work done effectively.

And if you want some help putting together your leadership strategy around time, make sure you check out my ***Time Savvy Leaders Do-It-Yourself Program***. It's all there for you with the videos and workbook to help you sort of plan out your overall time strategy. It's only $97, and it is available at *melsavage.com/time*.

Okay, my friends, that's what I have for you this week. I hope that helps. Let me know if you have any questions, and I'll talk to you next time. 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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