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WHY YOUR IDEAS KEEP GETTING SHUT DOWN

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. It's been a minute. It's been since February since I did my last episode of this podcast. I have to say I really missed it, but I went down a social media rabbit hole, and not in the way where I've been on TikTok all this time watching other people's TikToks, but I really decided I needed to build a system and a way of doing my social media about leadership.

So how could I do it in small-form, short-form ways to be able to engage people? And I was able to build my TikTok to 180,000 followers. So if you are a Tiktoker out there, make sure you follow me on TikTok. I am @leadershipmel on TikTok, same on Instagram. But Instagram's a little slow. Like, you know what? That whole Meta Universe thing's just not working for me as well as it used to. I'm still just below 10,000 followers on Instagram, but if you want to help me out there, absolutely go over to Instagram, follow me @leadershipmel. I was able to grow a hot couple thousand followers in the last few months, but time to get back to podcasting.

I do find that when, and this is good for everyone, any leader or any CEO or anybody who runs a team when you are doing something, setting up a new system like I was trying to figure out, putting a lot of energy into a lot of content building, or if you have any project that has a lot of moving parts to it or you're learning something new, I really needed to park something. I needed to pull back on something. And so that was my podcast. But now I have systems. I know what I'm doing on social media. I have it going on, and so I am now officially unpacking my podcast and getting back into it.

The other thing that I've been doing for the last few months is really segmenting my business around two distinct types of leadership stages, if you will. If you want to call it your life stages of leadership, and I'll bucket them into a couple of stages for you.

One is supporting new leaders, so leaders who are just coming out of the IC or individual contributor role, leaders who are maybe one to three years into leadership. I call those doers. And they're really just trying to step out of execution and step into authority, managing a team, figuring out how to offer value in this new role with a whole

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new set of skill sets. So everything's really new to these people. They're really just trying to stop being project or subject matter experts or project leaders and step into a leadership role.

And then the second bucket is the more seasoned leaders, four plus years, I would say. People who have kind of nailed the whole, "Okay, I'm now in my leadership phase. I've stepped away from being an IC." But they're really ready to expand their strategic impact. Their influence, their executive presence at the next level. They're not executives yet, obviously, but they are ready to start to be able to lead at that level.

So those are the two buckets I've decided to segment my business into, and I want to be able to, over time, build products for both of those groups. Right now, in my one-on-one, I talk to anybody in both of those groups. I can really customize. And of course, like people, as leaders ourselves, we don't necessarily fall cleanly into either one of those groups. Sometimes I've spoken to people in the C-suite who still have IC tendencies or doer tendencies, and they still have to clean a few things up. But mostly, largely, people will fall mainly into those two categories and then sort of overlap into the other one depending on where they are, where their development has been.

So I am launching a brand-new group coaching program to the new leader group, that doer group. I'm calling the program *Doer to Leader,* and it opens for enrollment at the end of September. It is a 12-month coaching program. So I'm not going to get into too much about it here right now. I'll talk more about it as we get closer to September. But if you want to know more about it and you want to make sure that you hear about it as we get closer and closer to the enrollment dates, make sure you go to my website, melsavage.com, get on my mailing list. I'll be talking about it to the people on my mailing list who can then self-select themselves to continue hearing about it. So make sure you do that, melsavage.com.

But today, we are talking about why your ideas keep getting shut down. I think this is more of the seasoned leader skill. This is a bit more of an advanced skill closer to building executive presence. And when I talk about executive presence, I'm not talking about it in terms of how you say things. I think some people think about executive presence in terms of their authority and how they present themselves. And I think that is part of it. But when I think about executive presence, it's really more about how you operate as a leader. Like, do you have the chops beyond how you say things? Are you able to emotionally, tactically, strategically, relationally operate as a leader? So that's kind of how I think about your executive presence, it's your presence in totality. How you present yourself in all aspects of leadership.

So when you're a newer leader, you're not really worried about how you're sharing your ideas. You're just really more sharing solutions to problems on a tactical level, still at that new leader stage.

But when you become more of an advanced leader, you're starting to share your ideas, your strategic thinking, your broader solutions. And if your ideas keep getting shut down, I just want you to know the problem isn't with the idea itself. It's really all about how and when you are bringing that idea to the table. It's not about the fact that your boss is a problem, or the culture is toxic, or people aren't listening to you, or they don't like you, or they don't find you valuable.

What if we took all of that stuff off the table and we just said, okay, maybe the problem isn't all of that. Maybe the problem is how and when you are bringing your ideas to the table. And that would be great, actually, because then you can control the solution, when the problem lies with something that you are doing.

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A lot of people will take it personally and start to think they're failing, but I always think, oh, if it's something that I'm doing, that's amazing because then I can fix that. And the good news is, as leaders, I want to say like 90% of the time, we can take accountability and fix the problem, even if it is that our boss doesn't like us so much.

But I'll get into that another day. Really, what we're talking about here is that your ideas aren't landing, not that they're not great ideas, but they're just not landing. And that can be everything from a one-on-one with your boss, or your manager, or your skip, to maybe sharing ideas in bigger rooms.

And the main issue is when you walk out of those conversations or you walk out of those rooms, you are feeling demotivated. You're wondering if anyone even heard you. You're starting to think, okay, these people don't value me. My ideas keep getting brushed off, or I'm being told to wait, or I'm told not now, or I'm told, let me think about it. Or worse, someone else says the exact same thing, either later in the same meeting or later to your boss, and they get credit for the idea. I've been there. That's happened to me. I remember speaking up, my manager was running the meeting, and I provided a solution. We were around the table with a bunch of people from our company, from our partner vendors, and I came up with a solution.

She didn't even react to what I said. And then later, not much later, like later on in the same meeting, someone came up with the same idea. She thought it was brilliant. And then someone else in the room said, okay, but that's what Mel just said five minutes ago. But whose fault is that? It's because I wasn't being heard.

It was because I didn't say things in a way that they could be heard. So the real issue is not about your ideas, not about whether you're confident enough, not whether you're qualified enough. The real issue is your framing, the trust you have with your audience, and whether it's in a meeting or one-on-one.

How we limit the overwhelm around the idea we're presenting. So how clear is it? How much info am I sharing? How risky is it? Or safe? Is it the timing? Like, am I bringing it up at the right time? All of those kinds of things, the information, the risk, the safety, the trust, all the things contribute to the sense of overwhelm.

It contributes to the sense of confusion. And what I often say is a confused mind always says no. I'm not even sure where I heard that. I don't think I came up with that, but it's true. A confused mind will always say no. So we want to make sure that people aren't confused or overwhelmed, that things are clear, that they feel safe to like the idea, that they're leaning into what we're saying, and we're picking the right moment in time to say things.

In this episode, I want to walk you through a bit more about why your ideas are getting shut down and three shifts that you can make that will help you show up more strategically, speak a bit more with authority, actually get heard, and implement things that you can start doing right away, right now, before your next meeting.

And I want to start broadly with the shift in your mindset around this. Because most leaders think that their job is to come up with great ideas and make strong cases for the ideas, and it's true. That is your job, to come up with great ideas and make strong cases for ideas, but it's the how you make a strong case for your idea that is in question here. Because in addition to coming up with the great ideas, it's also your job to warm up your audience to the idea even before you share the idea.

And that can be like days and weeks before you share the idea. It could be minutes before you share the idea. It just depends on the size of the idea.

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But you need to be able to warm up your audience to the idea before you share the idea. And I want you to think about it like if you were watching a movie. Like, you know in a movie, there's always this main plot idea, a big climax, a major conflict in the movie, and usually they share that. You build up to that in the movie, even if they start with that at the beginning of the movie, then they kind of backtrack so you understand what's happening and why this happened.

Because you need to understand this big climax, this big conflict, or this big idea in the movie, and you will only care about that big climax or idea because you bought into the premise of the movie. You know you are related and connected to the characters; you relate to the story. Because if you don't relate to any of it or understand any of it, you will get turned off.

If the movie is confusing, you will get turned off, and you'll probably turn it off. Because as I said before, a confused mind says no. If it's overwhelming, you will turn it off or you will take a break or you will come back to it. And sharing your ideas is very similar. I want you to think about the idea as the big climax or the major plot twist, or where the conflict happens.

Although I hesitate to use the word conflict, but you know what I'm saying, like where the big thing happens in the movie. That's not the place where you get the buy-in. The buy-in to what this big thing is happens before. It comes before the idea. Because by the time, let's say, that you are going into the meeting to present an idea to a bunch of people…

They already have their points of view. They already have an agenda. They've got so much on their minds. The real decision or the comments they're going to make in the meeting are already in motion, whether they know what you're going to present or not. Same thing when you have a one-on-one. It could be your manager's mind is somewhere else, focused on other things, has a point of view on the topic that you're going to talk about.

You've got to warm people up. Whether it's the stakeholders in a meeting environment or your line managers all the way up, you need to make sure that the groundwork has been laid in advance. Because you don't want to be pitching an idea. You want it to be kind of the natural progression of what you've already warmed them up to.

This isn't about speaking louder or selling harder. It's really shifting from pitching ideas to building alignment before you even open your mouth. I want you to think about that. So that's really what I want to reinforce here, why this problem is happening right now is because you think it's just your job to come up with great ideas. But your job isn't about just the idea. It's about building the alignment around the idea.

So the first shift I want you to make within that sort of major shift I just gave you is that you need to build relevance first. Most leaders want to impress with a fully thought-out idea, and they will say, "Oh, I have this idea." But what can often happen is that great, impressive idea lands flat.

Because they haven't been warmed up. Like, nobody cares how smart your idea is if they don't see why it matters. Just like the movie. Nobody's going to care about the big conflict or big climax of the movie if they don't see why it matters. And that's what is important about your idea. You have to set the context.

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First context is: What is the problem you're actually trying to solve here? And is there even alignment to your problem? Like, do your key stakeholders see the problem, think it's important, think it is a problem? And beyond that, once you get alignment to the idea that there is a problem, what would the potential solution need to solve for in the problem?

And I think when you speak to different stakeholders, they would have different, probably, twists or angles on the problem. They might need slightly different kinds of solutions to the problem to be able to fulfill the needs of their department or their agenda or their perspective. It's really important that you understand the problem.

Now, this can take hours, two days, two weeks, depending on the size of the thing that you're trying to solve for. It can be a couple of quick conversations, or it can be a lot more than that. But I think the big thing here about building relevance first is that you want to make sure people understand that there is a problem here to be solved.

Whoever is going to be feeding into your idea or having a point of view on your idea, you need to know that, one, they see the problem, and two, you understand their perspective on the problem. And when you talk to your stakeholders, you're going to see the different perspectives on the problem. If someone isn't totally bought in at that stage, then you can kind of get them bought into the problem, or you can sort of triage for that as you go.

Now, the second shift is making sure that you're socializing the idea before you get into the room. And that can be at your one-on-one as well, but let's just talk about the big room first. Then we can make it work in a one-on-one as well if you're just talking to your manager.

So now that you've got some relevance on the problem itself, if people are hearing your idea for the first time in a meeting where you want their yes or no, then you're already behind.

You need to be able to again socialize the idea. Test it with your stakeholders. Shape it with your stakeholders. Get early advocates for your ideas with different stakeholders. There's going to be resistance to your idea with some of those stakeholders. You want to deal with that ahead of time. You don't want to deal with that in the room.

You want to get people bought in by understanding their resistance to the problem. What did you miss in your solution that you could solve for? I want you to think about that, like shop your solution around, or parts of your solution around. Show why it solves the current problem that they're facing.

And if you've done your job to understand the perspective of your stakeholders on the problem, you'll be able to position your solution much more effectively back to those stakeholders because you understand what's really bothering them. You'll be able to anchor it to what really matters to them.

Make sure you let them poke holes in it before it's on display in front of everybody.

And when you are presenting it to everyone in the room, when you do all of this work, you're able to sort of make it feel like everyone's idea, not just your idea. And don't worry about that, because you actually have taken the time to make sure the idea is relevant and socialize the idea first. People will still see it as you're the one driving this, you're the one creating this, you're the one making this happen.

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And the more you present it like it's from everyone, the more people buy into it. That's the best part about it. Plus, you are building allies along the way, people who are trusting you and seeing you as someone who will come to them, who will consider them as they're bringing ideas forward.

And then, of course, it's easier if you are one-on-one, if you're going to your boss one-on-one to get an idea approved. And it's not, it's like huge where every stakeholder needs to be involved. Sometimes it's really good to actually socialize the idea before, because you can say, "Look, I bounced it off so-and-so and so-and-so. Here's what they had to say. Here's what I, so that based on that, they had this problem. I shared this. They liked that solution. I think it's a really easy way to move things forward."

This comes back to what I said before, where you want to limit the friction around the idea. So if there are going to be stakeholders that you're going to have to convince, like you're going to your boss one-on-one saying, "I have this idea," but right away your boss is going to think, "Okay, there are going to be stakeholders that need to be convinced, or who aren't going to like this, or who are going to push back", that creates friction.

So if you've already taken care of some of that, that limits the friction. Amazing. They're going to think about risk: What is the risk? What is the downside? What if this doesn't work? If you can take care of that ahead of time, and, of course, if you can pick the right timing, if your boss is freaking out about something else, now is not the time to pitch the idea. You want to make sure you're doing that as well.

But make sure, use what you can use to limit the friction so that it's going to be easier for your boss to get on board.

Now, I'm not going to talk about today how to speak with authority in those situations and be really clear, but suffice it to say, you don't want to get into all the weeds and details either before you tell them what your idea is. Because if you do that, it's just going to be more confusing. They're going to get caught up in the details, in the weeds. They're going to push you off on tangents. And again, a confused mind always says no. So you want to be super clear. You practice a little bit before you come up with something, or you're going to present something to your boss.

Oftentimes I hear, "Okay, but what if I'm doing all of this socializing and sharing, and someone steals my idea?" It can happen, depending on the culture in your organization. I think it's important at every stage that you're keeping the right people in the loop with what you're doing. Like if you are socializing, whether it's building relevance or you're socializing your idea, you're keeping senior stakeholders in the loop too. They are part of your socialization strategy.

So if someone is going to come back and try to sell them your idea, they're going to be like, "Okay, but you know what, Mel's all over this. Where are you coming from?" That sort of thing.

But ideally, that's not going to happen. That happens, I'm going to say rarely, but it does happen. So you just have to make sure that you are, if you're in an environment where people are going to steal your ideas, just make sure that you are aware of that and don't let it be a problem. Just make sure that you are talking to the right people, reinforcing your leadership on this idea with the right people so you are kind of covering your own butt on it.

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So I think the key takeaway on the idea of socializing before you're in the room is that influence will happen in the side conversations. Influence doesn't happen in the room. The decision happens in the room. The decision in the room is the culmination of all your influence prior to getting into the room. So influence happens in the side conversations, not while you're in the spotlight of the room.

And then the third shift I want you to think about in your mindset is I want you to stop chasing agreement with your idea and really be focused on building the best solution. And a lot of the time, we think the best solution is our own idea. I know we do. I have been there. But if you're just walking around trying to manipulate everybody to see it your way, that is going to come across and you're not going to build trust. You're actually going to become kind of icky, and people aren't going to want to talk to you. They're going to sense dishonesty. They're going to back away.

If your intent becomes, I want to say pure, but, and I want you to think, like, I'm not talking about altruistic here, but you know, if your intent is genuine and you really want to solve this problem, and you have ideas, and they see you as leading the solution, you're not selling, you're collaborating. You have an idea, but you want to make it stronger, and you will make it stronger when you listen to other people, when you listen to what's relevant to them, and you adapt. You adapt your idea to what they're saying. Then they're going to think, okay, this person is trustworthy.

And you are building equity with all of those allies, with all of those stakeholders who ultimately will become allies. People will see that you're not just trying to score points and tick boxes, but you're actually trying to build a real solution that will serve not just you, but everyone—the organization.

And building trust takes time. Of course it does. You have to build time into this plan to do this, but it also puts some deposits in the trust bank when you're doing this, because people will give you the benefit of the doubt in the future. It builds equity. And as you build more and more equity, it becomes easier and easier to create influence.

But it doesn't mean you can skip steps in the future. You still have to go through the steps, but the steps and the hoops will be easier to go through. They're still there, but you're going to move through them more elegantly the more trust that you have.

So I think one of the mistakes that a lot of leaders make is they don't build in this time for aligning on the relevance, socializing the idea as they go. And I think that's something that you really want to be thinking about as you are thinking about presenting things to people. It's not just how you say it, it's how you are building alignment as you go.

'Cause don't forget, you've been thinking about this for a while. Other people have not. They've got other things on their mind. Your job is to bring everybody along with you, and that's going to require you to slow down.
So those are the three main things—the shifts that I want you to think about starting to make. You're going to build relevance. You're going to socialize the idea before you get into "the room," whether that room is with one person or a group of people. And you're not going to be trying to chase agreement and sell your idea, but you're really trying to build the best solution for the problem and for the organization. That will always benefit you in the long run.

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So, if you're someone whose ideas aren't landing, don't make it about your volume or how loud you're talking. Don't make it a personal failing. Make it about your executive presence and your leadership strategy. Influence is a big part of your executive presence.

Because executive presence, like I said, isn't just how you speak. It's how you move. It's when you move. It's how you anticipate power dynamics. It's how you position your ideas. It's how you show up before these spotlight moments even happen.

So you don't need to push harder, you just need to move earlier so that when you do speak, when you do come forward with the recommendation, people are already on board. The decision or the presentation of the recommendation in the room is like a last step, not a first step. That's what makes your voice not just heard, but respected.

Okay, my friends, that's what I have for you this week. I'm so happy to be back. I hope you're happy that I am back, and I will talk to you next week.

Bye for now.

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