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WHY CHASING YOUR TEAM IS KILLING YOUR CREDIBILITY

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

Hey leaders, welcome back to the podcast. Today I'm talking about another advanced leadership topic, and it is one that helps you build your executive presence. And this one is all about how you're managing the workload on your team.

And I want to give you the bottom line upfront. If you are a leader who is still making sure that you're on top of all the work and you're finding yourself chasing the work or chasing your team members or reminding them what they're supposed to be doing, then you are likely putting a drag on your credibility, putting a drain on your authority, and ultimately your ability to have executive presence.

So in today's episode, what I really want to focus on is showing you why this need to chase your team or whatever—maybe it's not a need, it's just an action, it's something that you're still doing—I'll show you why doing that is hurting your leadership and how to shift into a style that focuses more on building accountability within your team and establishing your authority and trust with not just your team, but senior management as well.

So that's what we're focused on today. And before we get started, I just want to remind everyone that I am currently starting to segment my business where I want to be able to provide more focused support for more seasoned leaders versus the support that I give to the newer leaders, which I call like the doers—people transitioning from individual contributor into a leadership role. And to that end, I am launching a brand-new group coaching program called Doer to Leader, which is going to be all about helping those new leaders one to three years into leadership really establish themselves as leaders, figure out how to provide value in this new leadership role, and really establish yourself as someone who is a top performer and has made the transition from individual contributor or doer into a leadership role so seamlessly and beautifully. So if that is something that you are interested in knowing about, then make sure you get on my mailing list. Just go to melsavage.com,

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sign up for my newsletter. You'll get on my mailing list, and I will alert you to all the information coming down on that program.

And as I get closer, I will give you even more information and more places to go to get that information. But let's get back to what we're talking about today, which is really understanding why chasing your team is hurting your leadership credibility. Okay?

So let's talk about what's going on with you right now. If you're in this position, you are managing everything and everyone. You're reminding people about their deadlines. You are following up on things that they committed to do that maybe they haven't followed up on. You're asking for updates that were supposed to come to you unprompted. That were supposed to actually just come to you, and you're feeling overwhelmed just trying to keep track of it all.

Like it's something that's always on your mind. You're always feeling that pressure of all of it on your shoulders, like if you forget something, something's going to fall through the cracks—probably something really important—and then the shit's going to hit the fan.

And that is so exhausting. We often think that our burnout comes from all the things that we're focused on, and if you're doing this, there are a lot of things that you're focused on. But it's actually all the mental pressure—all the emotional and mental pressure—that you're putting on yourself that is causing you to be exhausted.

That's what causes burnout—not your to-do list. It's actually the emotional toll that your job is taking on you, that you allow your job to take on you. That generates burnout. And I'm going to do a whole separate podcast episode just on that. But that's basically where you are. You're sort of on top of everything.

In addition to all that mental pressure that you're putting on yourself, you're also kind of a bit annoyed. Because when you're in this position, a lot of the time, it can feel like you're the only adult in the room. You're the only one who feels accountable for everything. You feel like a nag. Like you're constantly chasing people. Like people see you coming and you're like, “Oh God, here comes the person who's going to tell me what I forgot to do.”

And you probably are thinking, “You know what, if I don't chase these people, nothing is going to move. Like I am the momentum of the team.” You can't even take a holiday without checking everything or being available if something goes wrong—and you resent that. You resent that even though...

I'm going to say this to you: you've put yourself in that position, and we're going to talk about getting you out of that position. You still resent being in that position because you feel like you have been put in that position.

That's the thing about resentment. We put ourselves in a situation, or we have an expectation of someone to do something—which they may or may not know about, by the way—and then when they don't do it, or we don't like the position we've put ourselves in, we end up resenting others for the situation that we're in. It's just the way our brain works. There's nothing wrong with you, but it's good to be onto that. Like, it's good to be savvy to that.

So in this situation, you've put yourself in a situation where you are the glue that's holding everything together, and you resent being the glue.

So in addition to the mental pressure of just making sure nothing falls through the cracks, there's also this underlying sense of resentment. That you have to be the nag of the team, which nobody wants to be either. You

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don't like being that person. Like, even in your relationship—like, I personally don't like being the person who has to remember all the things. I just wish sometimes my husband would, like, remember some of the things. Which, by the way, he's not bad at. Little insight into my life with Paul.

But yeah, I mean, no one wants to be a nag. And I don't even—I even hate that word, to be honest. Like, it's just like someone who remembers the things that need to happen to make life move—and in this case, make your team move.

But you don't know that if you don't feel like you should have to be that person. And by the way, you're right. You should not have to be that person.

So you have this sort of sense of exhaustion from trying to remember everything, and you have this sense of resentment that you have to be this person in the first place.

And it's not even an effective strategy because what ends up happening is that everything is running through you. You become a bottleneck. The work isn't flowing as smoothly as it could if people were making decisions and running with stuff without having to go through you, or if they were being accountable for their work without having to go through you or need you to chase them.

And when your team sees you doing all the follow-up and all the reminding and all the course correction, guess what? They're not apt to take responsibility because they don't have to. And they feel less responsible, and over time they just stop driving.

Which, to the people on your team who are high performers, that can also feel a little bit demotivating. Because even though they're not taking the responsibility—you know—it's not exciting to have to be chased all the time.

It's kind of like this thing where you don't do it, but when you're forced into a situation where you are challenged to grow, people love that. Some people love that. But you're not challenging them to grow, so they don't feel like they're growing—even though they could take that into their own hands.

So you have this situation where the people who are not necessarily high performers—you are performing for them. And the people who are high performers—they're not really being motivated to grow in any way.

And it kind of feels like you're a hero a little bit. Like, even though you're being a hero, you're still not setting yourself up to be perceived as a senior leadership person or an exec or executive material anyway.

Because you are not—it's not just exhausting, which of course impacts how you're showing up at work—but it's eroding how you're perceived.

Because the more you chase, the less credible you look. The more you look like you're a doer, the more you look like you are someone who's just in control of what's getting done, and that's the capacity that you have: is just enough capacity to make sure things are getting done. You can't go beyond that.

You're reinforcing this brand you have of being a taskmaster, not a leader.

And this is happening because you've been conditioned up till now to believe that being a good leader means staying on top of everything. That was the role that you stepped into when you first started to be a leader.

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You know, you stepped out of that doer role into leadership and you realized, “My job now is just to make sure things are happening on a grander scale—everyone is kind of doing their job—and it was working.” And you stopped doing all the work yourself, and you started making sure everything was going to get done, and that worked, and that’s how your leadership brand started to evolve.

And on top of that, your manager and the other senior people that you work with—they keep coming to you with all the questions. Because you’re the person who normally has all the answers, and they see you as the one with all the answers. And when you don’t have the answers, they make it look like you should have the answers.

So you feel under this pressure. And so that’s why it’s normal. That’s why it’s normal that you feel like continuing to do this thing that at one time made you valuable. It was what made you valuable. So let’s keep doing it.

And you know what? Your manager still expects you to be on top of everything. That you should be the one who should have caught it. If someone else drops the ball, it’s on you. The buck stops with you. All of that.

So it feels like you can’t stop being the one who knows everything, like there’s no way you could stop or get yourself out of that. But you have to, because you can’t be the one that knows everything and moves everything on the team—as well as stepping up into a more senior role as a leader.

Someone who spends a lot of their time influencing people, managing optics, resolving conflict, getting people on board, creating systems, building your brand—all those things. You don't have any time to do any of those things if the majority of your time is spent making sure you're on top of everything. And sooner or later, you're going to hit a ceiling. You're going to be stuck.

So I want you to think about asking yourself a different question. Because when you tell yourself, "I can't stop doing this," like, there's no way that I can stop doing this—being on top of everything and knowing all the answers—when you tell yourself that, your brain stops looking for ways to get out of that situation.

So instead, I want you to ask yourself, "If I wanted to evolve this. If I wanted to get out of having to know everything and being on top of everything and still have a high-functioning team who is being accountable," maybe not—and instead having a high-functioning team who is on top of everything and who is accountable and who is, as they say, "firing on all cylinders." I hate that jargon, but you know what I'm saying.

If that's what I want it to evolve to, how do I get there? And when you ask yourself a question on how to do something—like how to get somewhere—and give your brain the parameters for success, then your brain goes to work solving it. Maybe you don't solve it in that moment, but your brain goes to work on coming up with answers, and you start seeing answers.

Because your brain is like in the background looking. So when you're in a meeting or something happens, or you're reading something, or you watch something on TV, it clicks. One of the answers comes to you. You see an opportunity for change.

So you have to change your perspective. You have to want things to be different. And just like you wish your team was taking accountability, you have to take accountability on making the change. Don't feel trapped. Don't blame others. Don't blame your boss and the senior management for putting this on you, or your culture, or anything. You can change things wherever you are and whoever you work with if you take accountability for it.

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I promise you that. It may be your strategy has to slightly change based on who you're working with and the culture where you're working, but it is possible—because other people are doing it. So it's possible for you too.

So some of the things that you could think about is, first of all, to stop owning the follow-up. You just have to stop owning it. I know this is going to be hard because it becomes a bit existential—like everything at work seems to become a bit existential at some point. But, you start thinking, "If I don't own the follow-up, then things are going to fall through the cracks, and I am going to fail, and then I am going to be considered less valuable."

And I understand that mindset shift. Your brain will fight you on this. But you have to set the goal of stop owning the follow-up. And what I mean by that is, when your team comes to you—or not even when they come to you, when you've decided to give them something—you have to make clear that they're responsible.

First of all, you have to be clear on when you want what, how you want to be included, what kind of follow-up you want, etc. And then you can ask questions like, "What will your check-in cadence look like?" And then if they answer and you don't like it, then you can offer some additional ideas to them.

And if they say, "I don't know," then you can say, "I want you to come back to me by the end of the day with your check-in cadence." And if they don't come back to you at the end of the day—we'll talk about that in a second, what to do with that later on—but you need to say things like, "When should I expect an update?" or "These are the areas I want to have an update. I want those meetings in my calendar by the end of the day." Or something like—you can just sort of say what you want it to look like.

Or you can say to them the parameters for what the check-ins and the follow-ups need to look like and ask them to bring you a plan on how they intend to check in and follow up, etc.—what's their plan for it. Okay?

You might have to handhold them at the beginning a little bit. And when I say handholding, I don't mean give them all the answers. I mean, give them the time to think about it and follow up and think about it and follow up.

So it might take a little bit longer to get that plan in the beginning from them because they haven't done it before and they're kind of like, "What the heck's going on here?" Because boss used to tell me everything, boss used to come check on me, and boss is now changing the rules of the game.

So some people are not going to like this. Some people are going to love it. Some people are going to be confused at the beginning. You can allow for that. That doesn't mean it's not working. That just means you're creating change. You're creating a ripple, and people need to get adjusted. Okay?

So it is possible to do this. You just have to—it's going to be important for you to stay focused and consistent here to make this happen. Because if you own the follow-up, then you own the work. So you have to stop owning the follow-up because they need to own the follow-up and the work. Okay?

Now, even though you've just done that, the second thing you can do is make sure that you're creating a system around this. You don't want to be dealing with plugging your fingers in holes all the time.

A high-performing team doesn't run on your memory. It runs on shared systems of accountability. So whether it's regular check-ins or a dashboard or a scorecard, or simple expectations management, or a daily three-minute voice text or something that kind of highlights where they are on certain things, or a ten-minute standup every

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morning—whatever it's going to be—you need to have systems that you don't run, that kind of ladder up to you. Okay?

Where you are getting the updates, where you're not chasing. So when something goes sideways and they forget something or they don't make something happen, then it's about, "Where did the system fail?" or "What kind of system do we need to make sure that what we put in place doesn't happen again?"

And you don't solve for that. You say to them, "Where did the system fail?" Not, "Where did you fail?" Not, "Why didn't you get this done?"—"This needed to get done and it didn't. Where did the system fail? What system do we need to have in place so this doesn't happen again?"

I want you to talk in systems, not situations, if you will. I just made that up—it was very pithy, I think. Speak in systems, not situations, if that helps. Okay?

And create expectations around that. They need to know that your brain is not the project management tool. They are the leaders of the project management. They need to ladder up to you. Your brain is going to be busy on other things.

And so this is all about clearing space in your brain to step into bigger value opportunities for you with your executive presence. All right? And when you're doing this, that's going to mean that sometimes you're going to have to let things drop. Yes, sometimes the ball is going to get dropped. They are going to blow it, and they're going to blow it more than they get it right in the beginning.

You need to let that happen. And you need to let the people feel the impact of them blowing it. I'm not saying punishment. I'm saying they need to understand when this didn't happen, do you realize that this didn't happen? Do you realize what it did for this person? Do you realize the conversation I just had because that didn't happen?

You know? Would you like to go through that so you don't have to make 'em feel sort of guilty or anything, but how would you feel if that happened to you? Or maybe there's a data impact, there's real numbers around the impact. They need to have a sense of ownership of the consequences.

If there's no consequences, then there's no accountability. And if you're worried about, your boss or your boss's boss or someone else getting freaked out because things are falling through the cracks, this is where you need to step into managing the optics. Where you need to be able to say things like:

This is a transition. Like in your next one-on-one with your manager: "This is a transition I'm making with the team. This is what I'm doing. This is the kind of accountability I want to grow. Here's why I want to do it." Getting their input on it, they're going to say, "Okay, but nothing can drop." You can say, "Yes, I understand that."

And also, sometimes they need to have things dropped to be able to feel the consequences, because without consequences, there's no accountability. So we're going to manage that effectively and make sure that we are turning around solutions as quickly as possible. Like you need to have them—I don't want to say bought in—but they need to be aware of what you're trying to do here, and you need to be able to, based on your politics, get them on board and influence their alignment with that.

And by demonstrating the benefits and also listening to their concerns and finding solutions to their concerns—not ignoring them, not taking them as, "Oh, I'm not allowed to do this." But as a leader, we have to

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listen to the concerns of our stakeholders and then come back with solutions to address those concerns, not just give up on our strategies.

We have to adapt as we go. So, basically so far you are going to stop owning the follow-up. You're going to speak in systems, not in situations, with your team. You're always going to be talking to them about how to fix the system. If something is going wrong, you're going to let them fail. Let things drop.

Let them feel the consequences of what they're doing. And when that happens, you're going to coach the responsibility. And what I mean by that is you need to get them to think through what happened. Because if you keep stepping in to fix things and telling them where they went wrong and then going and fixing it, you are teaching them that they don't need to think ahead.

They don't need to anticipate problems, that they can just keep their heads down and do what they're doing and not worry about anything. And we know that doesn't work. That's not how strong executors think. So instead, when something's missed, when they let things drop, you have to not only talk about the systems, but before you even get to the systems, you're going to say, "What happened here?"

"Why didn't this work? What were you trying to achieve? What was your objective? Why didn't we achieve the objective? What would you do differently next time?" And you have to have a conversation in not an accusational way, but in a safe space to say, "Let's work through this. Let's figure out what happened."

Even if your brain's screaming at you—you know what happened, and you know why they didn't do this, and you know exactly how to fix it, and you only have 10 minutes, and it would be so much faster if you just gave them the answer—all those things will be going through your head, but actually, this is your leadership move: to hold the space.

'Cause you're going to say, "What happened there?" And they're going to be scared, and they're going to be intimidated, or they're not going to know exactly how to answer the question, or they're not going to know exactly what happened. You need to create a safe space for them to speak about it, to brainstorm a little bit—what could have gone wrong?

You can add things like, "Yes, that's good. I'm also seeing this as a possibility. Do you see that possibility? Does that resonate for you?" You know, you need to keep coaching them through their responsibility. And once they see what happened: "What would you do differently next time? Where did the system fail you? How would you adjust the system to make this work?"

Because leadership isn't about fixing work for people anymore. As you get more advanced, it's about growing the people. And the more seasoned you get as a leader, the more seasoned the people are who report to you. These aren't like newbies, new-in-positioned people. Rather, they're not like brand-new shiny people outta school.

They're not beginners. You're speaking to mid-level management people, and they need to feel that sense of responsibility as part of their growth so that they're going to be strong leaders one day. And that is your job—to help them get there. And this is how you do it: not by fixing things for them, but by teaching them how to be accountable and how to think ahead.

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And then, now that you're kind of getting your team working a little bit, at the same time, you've got to manage your brand perception. You're going to have to start shifting your brand with stakeholders because they're still going to come to you. They're not going to change just because you're changing right away.

They're going to want you to give them all the answers and know everything, and they may never want to change that. So you're going to have to figure out how to set up systems with your team—not that they're executing—so that you can get information laddered up to you. Not so that you're chasing it, but that it's consistently and easily and discernibly, effectively laddered up to you.

But as that's happening, you're going to need to teach your stakeholders how to see you—how you want to be perceived. You have to ask yourself, first of all, how do I want to be perceived? Do I want to be perceived as the person with all the answers? Do I want to be perceived as the leader whose team delivers?

Or the person who leads a team of go-to people, for instance? Or some version of that. Or a leader who grows really strong, effective leaders? You know, you have to figure out what it is that you want to be perceived as, and then it's about helping people see you as that. You can't go to them and say, "Hey, I know you used to think I'm a go-to person, but now I'm this really highly effective leader who's going to have a team of highly effective doers, so don't come to me anymore."

No, you can't do that. Everyone's going to go, "What the F are you talking about?" And people don't like to change. Even though they're senior people. You are going to have to shift your energy. They're going to still come to you with the questions, and you can't get frustrated by it.

You have to be calm and pragmatic. And basically, you might say to them, "I'm not sure. Let me get the details to you," or "Here's my understanding right now. I'll have so-and-so follow up with you," right? Or you can also integrate updates to the senior management within your system so they're coming to you with fewer things.

I don't worry about connecting your manager to your team members. Once you sort of say to them, you don't have to come across as the person who doesn't know the answers. You can say, "Look, my understanding is this. Let me check and see if anything's changed, and I'll have someone on the team follow up with you," or "I'll get back to you."

You don't want to be the bottleneck. Ideally, you do want to connect your manager with your team, and it's okay if they go to your team from now on to get certain updates. That's okay. And on top of updates that you're going to be feeding them in a consistent way so that they have a lot of the information—because you want to be the person that they're coming to for other things.

For strategic insight, for needed outcomes—like, "We need to solve this problem. What can we do here?" For dropping big messy things on you that you can get your hands in, roll up your sleeves, and figure out with your team. So you can still be their touchpoint on a lot of things.

You just might not be their go-to person anymore. Or the way that they come to you for go-to things, your response is going to change. It's going to be more grounded. It's not going to be, "Let me check on that for you." It's going to be, "Here's my understanding. Let me see if anything has changed, and I'll have so-and-so get back to you within the hour."

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You're still the go-to person. You're just not the order taker. You're not the taskmaster anymore. And you are going to be in charge of changing that perception about you, and that perception is going to shift based on your consistency in how you handle those situations. Okay?

All of this to say that you no longer have to be this human reminder system. Especially in today's day and age with AI and all the things—that is not leadership. Not executive leadership. I get it, like in the first one to three years of leadership, you are on top of things—although I still recommend managing your time and creating systems around that—but it's not your job to know everything and be everyone's reminder system.

That makes you a liability—a highly paid person who could have a lot more impact on the organization—and you will top out.

Because strong leaders don't chase. They set expectations. They build systems. They hold space for their team to have real ownership.

And when you stop doing all the follow-up, you start showing up with real authority to your senior managers.

'Cause a leader who's always chasing eventually gets seen as someone who's not being followed. I love that. A leader who's always chasing eventually gets seen as someone who's not being followed.
Mic drop moment. I feel like that's a mic drop moment.

That's what I have for you this week, my friends.

I will see you next week. And don't forget to check out my website. If you want to get into my *Doer to Leader* or someone on your team needs to get into my ***Doer to Leader*** program, it's a group program, it's launching at the end of September. It's going to be a 12-month program.

It's going to be so rich and so valuable to people who are transitioning into that leader role.

Go to my website, melsavage.com. Get on my mailing list, and I'll be sending out lots of information about it over the course of the next couple of months.

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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