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THE 3 HABITS THAT KEEP GETTING YOU OVERLOOKED

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.

Welcome back to the podcast. I'm so grateful to have you here. Today, we're talking to leaders out there who want to get to that next level of leadership but keep getting passed over for the next opportunity. That is so annoying when that happens.

It's happened to me, for sure. So I want to talk today about three habits that you might not be noticing that are getting you overlooked. But before I get to that, I just want to remind you out there, for my leaders who are interested in the Doer to Leader group coaching program that I'm launching at the end of September, if that's something that you want to get in on, or get notices about and get advanced enrollment and special bonuses for enrollment when I launch the program at the end of September, then you want to get on my waitlist.

All you need to do is go to melsavage.com. Get on my mailing list, and when you get on my mailing list, you're going to be automatically alerted on how to get on the waitlist. You can do that, and then when I open the program for enrollment at the end of September, you're going to be the first to know. And I'll be speaking to my mailing list about the program starting at the beginning of September, so you don't want to miss a thing. So again, go to melsavage.com and then just get on my mailing list any way you can there. The Leading Edge is my weekly newsletter that I send out with weekly tips on leadership. Get on that. It's at the bottom in the footer on my webpage, on the homepage. When you land there, just get on the mailing list and you'll be alerted to all the good details.

So today we are talking about the three habits that keep getting you overlooked, and I want you to consider for this particular podcast that maybe the reason that you're getting overlooked is because maybe you're not ready yet.

Now, don't be mad. If you're not ready yet, I'm going to help you assess whether that's true for you or not.

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I'm going to help you make the shift to be ready and start changing perceptions in your organization. But a lot of the time, what I see is some folks who just like to blame the circumstances around them. So it's my manager. It's my organization. It's the politics. It's who's friends with whom, that sort of thing.

And that all plays into it. I am not going to be naive and say that it doesn't. And also, even though all those things exist pretty much in every single organization, I like to operate in a world of 100% accountability. Meaning I don't give a shit what's going on with the politics and who's friends with who and whatever, and what special hoops I need to jump through because of who I am or who I know, or that I'm a woman or whatever it is.

I like to operate in 100% accountability. Meaning, I got to figure out what hoops I've got to jump through, and then if I want this thing, I've got to jump through those hoops. I got to figure out my special hoop path to success, if you will. I don't know if that plays, but we're just going to go with it, all right?

So the question is, have you done everything you can?

Now, sometimes the issue is more of a marketing issue. Meaning, are you marketing yourself effectively? That's true for pretty much everyone I've ever met. They're not marketing themselves that great. And you should be doing that always.

And sometimes, it's also how your skill set is evolving. And so for you, that might mean you're doing everything you can, but maybe you're not doing the right things in the right way. And the way people see you is not the way you need to be seen in order for you to get to the next level of leadership.

I want you just to consider that for today's topic, it could potentially be possible. And this doesn't mean that you are not doing really good work, that you're not valuable, that you're not working hard, that you're not smart, none of those things. You are certainly all of those things. And it's also possible that you need to change your style a bit, a little bit, what you're focused on, in order to get to the next level.

Let's just leave space for what could be possible.

So in this episode, what I really want to walk you through are three common habits that just quietly hold leaders back. They are your blind spots.

And when you start to notice some of these things, the three that I'm going to tell you, because there's kind of more than three, obviously, but these three are fundamental and express themselves in different ways in what you do and how you're doing your work.

So once you start to see them, you're going to be able to make the shift so easily, and you will get seen, and you will get heard, and you'll get taken seriously. And that, combined with the right self-marketing plan, is going to get you the promotions that you're looking for.

So I always like to think about what's happening with you, and I think about myself too, when I was at that level, and I was thinking in my mind like, I'm doing great work here.

Like, I'm busting my ass. I'm showing up every day. I'm delivering exactly what's asked, sometimes more, which may or may not be a good thing, but okay, sometimes more. And I've got crazy deadlines that I'm always juggling,

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but I'm keeping things on track and I'm making sure nothing slips. And on top of that, and I'm sure you get this too, where there's constant, urgent things coming in that you are jumping on, and you're reprioritizing, and someone needs help, and you're saying yes.

You're just the kind of person who rolls up their sleeves and makes everything happen. You're kind of like a go-to person that people can count on, and it's been what's always gotten you ahead, being that person.

And it's really not just about that; it's always gotten you ahead. It really defines who you are, how you value yourself, not just how you're being valued at work, historically.

At least it was that way for me. Like, I felt valuable in my own skin, not just because people told me, "Oh, great job, Mel." It was like, this is who I am. This is what I'm great at.

It was an identity, not just a way of behaving, if you will.

But what happens with that at a certain point in your leadership is that it starts to hold you back, because you're doing all these things, and yet when the big opportunities are coming up, someone else is getting tapped, someone else is invited into a room on the big project.

You're like, “Why am I not being invited onto that?”

Like, I am worthy of that. And you're left kind of sitting there going, “How are they getting picked when I've been here longer? Or I have been doing this amazing work this whole time. Or it's my turn.” Or whatever it is.

It is frustrating, and it is deflating. And if you're being honest with yourself, it's starting to make you question yourself or your organization or the people around you.

Like, what do I need to do?

I just had to hold myself back there. What do I need to do to get noticed?

And so for some people that I work with, the problem is largely a marketing problem. That you believe that your work needs to speak for itself.

And really, what you need to be doing is marketing your results and who you are and your style and your identity and the value that you bring, consistently, to all the right people.

By the way, which everybody needs to be doing all the time anyway.

So if you're not doing that, come work with me, 'cause we're going to build a brand plan for you and we're going to make that happen.

But it's not always just that. So before you assume that it's only that, you need to ask yourself, “Even though I'm delivering right now, am I operating at the level of the role that I want?”

And I'm being really serious about this. I want you to really write this question down:

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Am I operating at the level of the role that I want?

That is a question you can ask yourself at every decision point throughout your day.

What would the person, like, let's say you're trying to get a job as a VP, as your next level, what would VP-me think?

What would COO-me think?

What would I, 12 months from now, want to do with this?

Whatever it is. I want you to think about that:

Am I operating at the level of the role that I want?

It may be that you're reinforcing the wrong version of your value.

I want you to think about that.

What I mean by that is you are reinforcing your value every day, but it's your value at a level that's not the level of the role that you want.

An example: you're operating as someone who knows how to run a team and get the work done, not as someone who can influence the organization and think strategically and be calm in the face of chaos and be motivating and deal with conflict and know how to get to the point and all of the things. Like, it's important that you got to be thinking about, am I operating, am I making this decision from my VP self?

I'm just going to keep using that example, just because VP's short and it's easy to say. Am I making this decision as my VP self? Am I deciding what to prioritize on my to-do list as my VP self?

You've got to be thinking about not just what you're doing, but how you're doing it. I'm going to talk about that more. Because if your habits are still rooted in proving and pleasing and waiting for permission and saying yes to everything, at the senior level, that's not what people do. People aren't promoted because they're great executors anymore.

That's how you got into leadership. But that's not how you're going to keep getting promoted in leadership.

So would the way you operate today be the way you would operate in the role that you want in the future?

And don't get caught up in the "well, in this new role, I'm going to have new responsibilities. I'm going to be able to operate at a different level when I get there." No, don't get caught up in that. You need to think about: can I operate that way now? And I don't mean the things that you're doing. I mean, who you are being, how you are tackling the challenges and the opportunities you're facing today.

Like I said, because at the senior level, people are promoted for how they think and how they lead and how they influence outcomes, not the tasks that they've achieved.

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So when a task comes to you, an opportunity comes to you, it's about how you're thinking about that task, how it ladders up in the organization, how you lead it to get it done. Are you rolling up your sleeves? Are you helping other people do it? Are you influencing decisions to get this thing done right?

Or are you just jumping in and getting it done like you've always done?

So you have to think about: is your style maturing? Is your leadership style maturing from handling the tasks to leading the organization?

So here are three very subtle habits that sometimes we keep going with, because the idea of saying, "Okay, I'm not going to do anymore. I'm going to get help, people get the work done, I'm going to delegate more", that's easy. But there are some subtle things that you're doing that are keeping you in that executional vibe or that execution identity.

So let's talk about the three habits.

And I want to start with habit number one. And this continues with what we were just saying.

You lean towards execution. You subtly, I'm going to call it this, you subtly lean towards execution.

I'm going to give you a good example of that: your calendar is filled with meetings about doing.

Now, I think in today's day and age, to say that your calendar isn't filled with meetings is a tough thing to do.

I'm hoping that you have time for focus, time for you. But a lot of the time, when you're leading, your calendar is still filled with meetings. But the meetings aren't about doing all the time. They're about leading.

And let me tell you what I mean by that. I want you to look at your calendar and just see, look at the meetings and say, are they about doing things like tasks, discussing tasks, discussing deliverables? Like the how I'm going to get them done, type of thing. Problem-solving, like brainstorming with people on how to do something, like how to get it done?

All right. That generally will keep you busy and productive. It also reinforces your role, your current value identity, as someone who is an executional expert.

And we lean towards that because that's who we are. We've been that person for a lot of the time, and we feel good that way. So it makes sense that you're doing that.

But what we want to have more in our calendar is leaving room for connecting, talking to senior stakeholders or other peer stakeholders, even about situations, dealing with conflict, influencing them by, you know, you're just meeting with people to say,

"Okay, let's talk about this idea. What are your thoughts on it? What do you think? How do we…", not how do we solve this problem, but "What would a solution need to include for you?"

Like, so you're spending time influencing. You're spending time connecting. You're spending time talking, you know, just understanding where people are at on the issues that you are leading.

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So it's not just about calling up to say, "Hey, how are you?" Don't get me wrong, you should do that, like have that as part of the conversation. You want to be a human being.

But it is about talking to them about, "These are the projects, like, how are you feeling about it? Like, what's going on? Here's where we're going with it." Like, you're keeping people in the loop. You're managing the organization.

Now, I can't give you what "in the loop" means on a grand scale. I don't want you to think you're just giving people status updates. But you are including people along the way. And that is a leadership task. That is a leadership move.

I should write this down right now, that I need to do an episode on how to connect with people in a non-task-oriented way. But that's what we need to do. Because then you're starting to be seen as a strategic leader.

You're forward-thinking. You're thinking, "This is where we're going with this. Here's why we're going there." You know, especially with people who are squeaky wheels, that you want to have these conversations with as well, because you want to keep them focused and onside and understand where they're at with things.

So it's not about filling your whole calendar with influential things, but it's about having a better balance in your calendar now. On making room for things like relationship-building and influence, along with some more higher-level problem-solving, you know, department head-type of meetings that you're having that are more, let's call them executionally focused or task-oriented, but picking the right ones.

You need to have a better balance in your calendar. So I think a calendar is a really great way of looking at, like, what am I actually doing week on week? And am I taking control of what I am spending my time on?

Sometimes we let our calendars control us, and we need to actually, because there's always stuff coming in, but we need to prioritize. And some of these relationship and influence-building conversations are things we have to intentionally make room for because they're not the things that are on fire… until they are. Until someone's screaming, "No, we're never going to do that! Cancel this project!" But then it's way too late at that point to influence things. You need to make room upfront, and that has to be intentional, and it has to be something that is important to you and is seen as valuable. And you're managing up to your managers that it's valuable.

So you really need to take a look at your calendar overall, because when you are spending more time influencing and relationship-building, that signals that you are making the shift from being task-oriented to leadership, to strategic, to next-level oriented. Senior leaders are looking for people who can elevate the conversation, not just keep the work moving forward.

So the summary here is: if you don't elevate your focus, they can't elevate your role. Because you're not operating at that level of who you want to be.

Now, habit number two is really about waiting to be invited. So this shows up in a lot of different ways, and I know this is really hard sometimes to level up into because of politics and people's egos and stuff. But a great leader finds a way. You've got to find your way through the hoops.

So what I mean by waiting to be invited is you basically are holding back your opinion or your ideas, your strategic ideas, until you're asked to provide them. That could be in meetings or with specific decisions, or

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visibility moments, or even creating visibility moments for yourself. Or, you know, just chatting with other people, senior people or influential people, about your ideas, even if it's after the meeting sometimes.

And the reason we hold back is because we think we're not allowed to have those conversations. We think we're not allowed. We're not allowed to overstep our bosses or the situation, whatever. It feels more polite to wait until you're asked. It's certainly safer 'cause you're not going to be ruffling feathers. Like, what if you say the wrong thing? And it feels like you're respecting the process and the people that you work with. And that is true.

But sometimes in some, like I think a lot of organizations, people have managers or… I wouldn't say organizations, I would say a lot of situations (because I don't think this is organizationally specific), but a lot of people will work with managers that don't mind if you reach out to your manager's peers, or sometimes even your manager's manager to share ideas or, you know, get perspective on things to shape your ideas.

That's sometimes a great way to soften things, where you can say, like, "I've been thinking about something I want to talk to my manager about. What's your perspective on this? I'm still shaping my thinking." You know, maybe those aren't the exact words that you want to use; it really depends on your organization, but that's a great way to start conversations. And that's how you start influencing as well.

You've got to find the way. Like, if you have a manager who doesn't want you to speak to their manager, okay, you don't want to ruffle feathers. But what's the way that you will start to demonstrate, and who will you start to demonstrate your strategic thinking with, that sort of thing? You have to find a way through. And maybe you'll try 10 different things and they won't work, but you keep trying 11 through 20. Until you figure out what works there, and you keep building your way of doing this. You don't give up.

Sometimes I would suggest that giving up is also waiting for permission. Like, I'm just sitting there saying I'm not allowed, is a version of you waiting for permission. So I want you to think about that. What are the ways that you are waiting for permission to be invited, whether it's in conversations or sharing your opinion or just doing things?

Think about that and how it ties into what you're doing. It also ties into the idea that you operate reactively. That's what ends up happening: people will see you operating reactively when you wait for permission, versus proactively. And when you operate proactively, you're starting to claim your own space. That's what leaders do. And when you're just following all the rules and operating reactively, that is often a hallmark of not quite being ready for the next level.

People don't see you. There are lots of ways to be seen. And when you're following all the rules, sometimes you're not seen.

I don't work in corporate anymore, and I have a few friends who have left the corporate environment or have retired from the corporate environment, many of whom are still in. And we often joke that it was the corporate environment that taught us to become rule-breakers. I have some friends who are actually teachers, and they follow all the rules. And you know, in a good way. Obviously, I make fun of them. And they make fun of me, too. But, you know, they follow all the rules.

But it was corporate, like the prevailing understanding is that if you follow all the rules, you can't get anything done in corporate. If you follow all the rules, you can't make a name for yourself. You can't grow in a corporate. Because people who follow all the rules just don't get ahead.

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That is a sweeping generalization. I'm not telling you to break all the rules. You know your corporate environments better than I do. But it's something that I joke about with my friends. And it's kind of true.

If you're waiting to be told it's okay, then you're being someone who operates safely, who's very reactive and not proactively finding ways to be seen and heard.

So the shift you really want to make here is that you are showing up like you belong in the room before anyone asks. Again, I want you to think about that VP you, or you in 12 months from now. Are you at your next level? How would they handle the situation? Would they tell themselves, “Well, I have to wait for permission?” Would they tell themselves, “Well, I can't. I'm not allowed to speak at this level with these people?” Or would they find a way to show up like they belong in the room before anyone asks?

Using their voice, sharing their thinking, trying to find ways to shape direction in real-time. Executive presence is about showing up before someone asks, being proactive with that, and never giving up. Finding ways to reach your goals that way.

So I'm calling this habit “Waiting to be invited.” And find the subtle ways that that is showing up for you. It could just be as subtle as not finding ways to make things happen, like giving up too soon, waiting to be told, just following the rules and saying, “Okay, well, I'm not allowed to do that, so I won't.” Think about that.

And then habit number three is you're communicating in outputs and not outcomes. Communicating in outputs and not outcomes.

What the F do I mean by that?

Basically, what I'm saying here is you are speaking in tactics and not in strategy. You're communicating what you've done, what needs to be done next, what the updates are, what the deliverables are, and what the activities are. When someone comes to you with a problem or, you know, even if it's a bigger problem to solve, like “How will we grow sales?” you'll come forward with technical ideas: “We could run this promotion, we could do that thing.”

So you are focusing on, basically, outputs. What could be done? And that signals you as someone who thinks in execution.

Now, I'm not saying you have to give up that way of being creative, to think executionally. Because I think thinking executionally is an incredibly valuable creative thinking exercise. But as a leader, you want to be able to think broader in terms of what we need to achieve, not what we need to do. Alright?

So I think this is, I'm going to give you a very basic example. Oftentimes, when I'm dealing with brand-new leaders and they're learning to delegate and manage a team, I will say things like, “Okay, you're not allowed to solve any problems for your team.”

Because oftentimes your team will run to you with, “This happened and this happened, what should we do?” And then what happens with a lot of leaders, new leaders, and maybe even you as a slightly less new leader (I know it took me a while to stop doing this), we want to give them the answer because it's the fastest thing going.

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But that's you communicating in outputs. “What should I do, boss?” “Oh, do this.”

And when I tell these new leaders that they need to stop solving all the problems for their team, I’ll say things like, “Your job is to focus on the people, and let the people focus on the problem.”

And what I mean by that is you need to help them think through how to solve the problem. But these new leaders have a really hard time with this because they're not seasoned or practiced in thinking strategically yet. They're thinking about how we need to do something, not why this problem is even happening.

Because they'll say to me, “Well, what questions should I ask them?” And I say to them, “Okay, well, you need to ask them the questions that you would ask yourself if you were solving the problem.” Because that's how you're thinking. That's the strategy.

We're thinking strategically. “Why is this problem here? What am I trying to achieve? What does success look like? Where are the dependencies here? Who needs to understand this? Where are the barriers going to come from? What could I anticipate as a problem going forward?”

These are the questions. These are the types of things that we explore in our minds very quickly, which is kind of strategic, and then we blurt out the answer in our brain, and that's what comes out of our mouth. We start taking action. But you need to slow things down enough to think about the why behind the how.

So I think when I talk to new leaders, they have a hard time doing that because they haven't really distinguished that in their own brains, the why and the how. They don't have practice actually slowing down and just focusing on the strategy and letting someone else focus on the task execution of what the answers to those strategic questions are.

So that is an example of being focused on outputs versus outcomes.

The outcome, like if you don't want to solve any problems for your people anymore, let your people focus on the problems, and you focus on the people, then you need to be focused on the strategy behind the problem they're bringing to you, and not the actual solution.

This takes more time. This means you are going to spend more time with your report to help them think through things. And we start freaking out and thinking we don't have time. But guess what?

Your job isn't to be fast anymore. Your job is to help grow your people.

This is another example of focusing on outcomes and not outputs. When you focus on outputs, you focus on being fast. What is the fastest way from A to B? When you are focused on outcomes, you're focused on the bigger picture: “How can I solve this universally?” “How can I grow this person?”

That is my job, not to solve this problem. My job is to grow this person, which takes more time than solving the problem. But solving the problem isn't my job, it's their job. My job is to grow them into people who solve problems.

That's you focusing on the outcome you're trying to achieve, which is growing the person to solve the problem.

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Another example. Of you focusing on outcomes as a leader versus outputs?

It could even be, like I say, if someone comes to you with, "We need to drive sales 5%," someone from senior management, as an example. Or, "No, our sales are behind. We need to turn things around." Whatever. You don't throw tactics in their face. You're like, "What is the problem? Why are we having the problem? You know, what are the kinds of things, areas that we need to focus on? Or, what do we..." I don't want to say, "What do we need to do?" but it's almost like, "What are the... what are the ways we need to go?"

What is the process we need to move through to be able to come up with the right solutions to this problem? You're thinking differently. When someone asks you a question, or when a senior management person asks you a question in a meeting, you don't come through with a yes or no answer. You might even say, "Look, strategically, I think we need to focus here."

And that's why I would recommend doing this tactic. You are framing your answers in strategy, not just answering the question. This isn't court, you're allowed to add context. So we want you to look at the way, who you are, and how you are communicating in outputs and not outcomes.

Are you thinking tactically? Are you acting tactically and not strategically? Are you speaking tactically and not framing things strategically? When you lead with the outcome, when you lead with the strategy, when you lead with the why, which is the result and the impact and the decision point, then other people understand.

How? Or other people can come up with the how. And that's when you start to demonstrate that you are more of a leader and a thinker than a doer. And that is part of the persona and the identity that you want to create with yourself, with other people, but also with yourself. You have to make that shift.

So you want to stop reporting the work and start communicating the vision, the why. You want to start communicating at a results level.

So those are the three things that I want you to think about and how you're showing up as a leader right now. Are you stuck in the execution thinking?

And we gave lots of examples of how that shows up with you. Are you waiting to be invited? That shows up in a lot of different ways as well. And are you communicating in outputs versus outcomes? And it's insidious. It shows up in all different kinds of ways, not just in one way. So start reflecting on how that might be showing up with you.

All right? So if you are being overlooked, it's not necessarily because you're not good, you're not valuable. You're just demonstrating a value in a way that's not the way that you would be if you were in the bigger role or doing the thing. I want you to think about what kind of signals you're sending.

Is your behavior signaling a leadership behavior, or is it signaling an executional, tactical, get-things-done type of behavior? And I want you to remember, these are things you can change. Nobody has to change. Nobody. Nope. You don't have to get a new boss, or a new job, or anything, a new culture, because the challenges that you're facing here in your current situation with this are going to be challenges you're facing in every job.

So don't leave unless there's like some sort of really, really, really bad situation that you're facing. Don't leave. Practice where you are stepping into this role. And you don't have to change who you are, your value system. You

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just need to redefine how you execute against that value. So, as an example of what I mean, if you consider yourself someone who's reliable, that's great.

You can keep that. That's a strategy. But right now, you're executing reliability as someone who gets everything done. How would you execute reliability as a strategic leader? You need to think about things like that. So don't think that you're becoming someone you're not, or being inauthentic to who you are.

You're just redefining how you're showing up as who you are.

All right? So get ready to elevate. Get ready to influence. Lead with intention. And when you shift, when you make those shifts, people are going to start to notice. They're going to start to see you differently. Not only are they going to start to see you differently…

You are going to start to see yourself differently.

That's what I have for you this week, my friends. I will speak to you next week.

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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