

LEADERSHIP LEARNING GUIDE / EPISODE 3

What a Leg of Lamb Taught Me About Leadership

Topic: Learning to see, questioning inherited processes and respect for people Audience: Leadership, management, operations, Lean and organizational behavior courses

ABOUT THE EPISODE

A team member spent three days heat-sealing hundreds of small parts. The next operation immediately cut those bags open so bearings could be pressed into the parts. When Pete asked why, the answer was simple: it had always been done that way. Engineering and Quality confirmed that sealing was required only for parts going into storage; these parts were being used immediately. The episode connects that discovery to the familiar leg-of-lamb story: practices can survive long after the reason for them has disappeared.

We hadn't just wasted three days of labor - we wasted three days of someone's ability.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After watching, students should be able to:

- Explain how direct observation can reveal waste hidden by routine.
- Distinguish a real process requirement from a habit that continues without a current purpose.
- Describe how questioning a process can demonstrate respect for the person doing the work.
- Identify what a leader should verify before eliminating an established process step.

FOUR PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES

1. Go see the work. Direct observation reveals details that reports and meetings can miss.
2. Question the process, not the person. Curiosity uncovers causes without assigning blame.
3. Verify the requirement. Separate customer, quality and engineering needs from inherited habit.
4. Respect people's ability. Removing meaningless work frees employees to create value and solve problems.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why might the sealing step have continued for years even though it was unnecessary here?
2. How can a leader question a long-standing practice without criticizing the employee following it?
3. What should be verified before eliminating a process step that appears unnecessary?
4. Why is wasting an employee's ability a leadership issue as well as an efficiency issue?
5. What 'leg of lamb' practice have you seen that continued mainly because nobody questioned it?

FIVE-MINUTE CLASSROOM ACTIVITY / QUESTION THE TRADITION

Choose a familiar process from work, school or daily life. Identify one step people perform because 'that's how we do it.' Write the purpose it may originally have served, one piece of evidence you would seek to determine whether it is still needed, and one respectful question you would ask the person doing the work. Share one example with a partner.

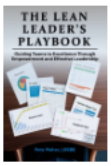
KEY TAKEAWAY

Leaders learn to see by observing the actual work, questioning assumptions and respecting the knowledge and time of the people doing it.

GO SEE. ASK WHY. RESPECT THE PERSON.

WATCH LEG OF LAMB
https://youtu.be/NP4G3-_9w7s

Scan the code to watch on YouTube.



Explore the principles behind this case in
The Lean Leader’s Playbook.
Explore how questioning inherited practices removes needless work and respects people’s abilities.

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