Session 3.14 | 3 Things You Didn't Think Were a Problem

We have been looking at the reasons why leaders struggle to apply learning:

1. Investing in Others and how that we're investing in other people so much that often it's difficult for us to find the time to invest in our own development.
2. Busyness & Distraction
3. Don't take time to fully recharge. And we looked at two key disciplines for leaders to follow to maintain energy.
4. Obstacles. What to do when you're facing something incredibly challenging in your life and work.

In this session, I am going to show you the 3 challenges every leader must confront to apply learning in their life and work. From our work with leaders over the past 20 years, these are 3 areas in which most leaders, not only don't realize that they have a problem, but often would deny that there is a problem.

These 3 areas could be blind spots for most leaders.

So, here's reason #5 that most leaders struggle to apply learning...

5. Inaction.

Believing that you can doesn't make the difference. Believing that you will doesn't make the difference, any more than getting the fitness equipment or getting a gym membership makes a difference to your health.

Taking action is what makes the difference. Doing makes the difference. Applying the learning makes the difference.

Every leader believes. It's why we made the decision to lead. But not every leader takes action.

Those that don't take action when it's needed are leaders that people have to follow. Those who are unwilling to confront the chaos and begin making decisions which simplify are leaders that people have to follow.

Those that do take action can become leaders worth following.

Taking action makes the difference. You can't take action in isolation. It's a team sport. And that brings us to...

6. Low Accountability. We also know that accountability makes the difference. Yet, not every leader is intentional about accountability.

In a recent study in a market segment – leaders in this market segment were asked how many close friends that they have. 72% of the leaders said they had zero friends. Not that they had less than 5 or less than 10 or I can count them with one hand. 72% of them said zero close friends. 72% of those leaders in that market segment had no one who is speaking significantly into their life, work, and leadership.

Think about this - Who is speaking into your life, your work, your leadership on a regular basis? Who have you given permission or freedom to speak into your life? Have you ever invited people or other leaders into this space for you?

If not, you cannot be the leader worth following that your people are so desperately searching for.

If you do, if you put an accountability structure in place, respect will go up.

Influence will go up. Impact will go up. You will be on the path to becoming the leader that people want to follow - a leader worth following.

7. Not Listening. Every single one of us knows that in order to lead we must listen.

Some managers naturally focus on tasks and projects. Yet, the best leaders focus on the needs of people that they serve.

Although many of our team members may be subordinates, they're also partners in the great work that we do and they need to know – without a doubt – that they have absolute freedom to contribute their unique perspective to the organization, specifically to you, even when it differs from yours.

Their perspective will be different from yours – regularly. So if you are going to influence people, you must slow down and listen – long enough to understand and consider their perspective.

Often, it will require you to listen longer than you ever thought you'd be able to.

Most employees think that their boss is deaf to their recommendations, to their observations, to their pleas for more resources. And very few managers realize that their team feels this way.

As we think about this a little bit more, I want to share with you 4 reasons why your team members think that you aren't listening…

1. They don't feel supported.

A few years ago, I was confronted by several frustrated team members from my team.

I always want to hear from them so when we sat down, one of them told me that if they made a mistake I would occasionally "throw them under the bus".

I didn't think that I was doing this. In fact, even when they told me, I had a different interpretation of what happened. I had no idea I was doing this because it conflicted with everything I believe about developing people.

He told me – "I need to know you that have my back."

It's not enough to say you will – to believe that you should. I need to see you do it.

Support, encourage, and resource your team privately, publicly, and often.

2. They don't feel valued.

Talented people and their ideas are an organization's greatest assets. So we work really hard to hire top-quality people. In fact, we've hired people from some of the top companies in our region.

Even talented people struggle with insecurity. They wonder if they have what it takes – if their boss or their team members believe in them.

Great leaders regularly seek feedback from them. It's this simple practice that communicates to team members that they are valued.

3. They aren't trained and resourced effectively.

There are going to be times when a team member shows uncertainty or lacks proficiency in some aspect of their job. When that happens, don't write them off. Don't get frustrated. Don't react.

Instead, ask: What training and resources can I provide that will help this team member to grow – in this project, in this role, or in their career?

And make sure that they are trained, resourced, on boarded effectively.

4. They don't know what's expected of them.

When I first began working with organizations around the country, I was shocked at the number of organizations and teams that don't have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Many have no position descriptions – and those that do, have not clearly defined the outcomes that are expected.

Every position should have a job description and a position guide that details core functions, responsibilities, outcomes, requirements, training, resources, and procedures for the role. All of these should be included. Then, these items should be regularly communicated and evaluated.

Bonus Tip: The one question you should teach every one of your team members to ask you.

I can't tell you how many times there's been a miscommunication between me and a team member. In fact, it happens almost every day. In fast-moving companies, teams, and organizations, it happens all the time.

I intend to communicate – "Hey, good job this time. Next time let's improve on this one small aspect of the project."

What they hear is – "You didn't perform at an acceptable level. You'll be gone soon."

If you think that your situation is different and you communicate better - you're wrong. Every leader struggles with awareness in this area. It starts with first accepting the fact that you may not understand or you may have a blind spot in this area.

There's no way to avoid these miscommunications. Believe me – we've tried. It's because each of us bring history, experience, baggage, and perspective into our interactions. So miscommunication is inevitable – it's going to happen. And when it happens – there's a simple solution to clarifying the intended message. Teach your team members to ask you this simple question – "Am I in trouble?"

This one exercise does 3 things:

1. It lets you know your voice feels heavier at the moment than you intend. Because most of the time, when they repeat back to you what they feel like you said, it sounds much heavier than what you intended. So, by asking this question it reminds you that there are times when your voice sounds and feels heavier than what you intend.
2. It gives you the opportunity to reassure them that their job isn't in jeopardy. That you're simply giving them feedback so they can improve next time for the organization, for the team, for the project.
3. If they are in trouble, it provides an opportunity for them to improve – before it's too late.

Listen first. Then you will know how to support them, how to communicate what's expected, how to train, and how to resource.

If you haven't already, download the Worksheet that goes along with this session and complete the Action items for this session.

Remember, you don't have to get it perfect. You just need to take the next step.

Next Session

I hope these 3 concepts we looked at in this session were as helpful to you as they are challenging. In the next session I am going to introduce you to 2 tools which will dramatically improve your interactions and your productivity and results at work.

So I'll see you in the next session!

Fast Action Steps

1. Identify the most important area where you need to take action immediately.
2. Who have you made yourself accountable to? If there isn't someone, how can you change that this week?
3. What specific steps can you take to ensure your team knows you are listening?