

When Leaders Have No Room to Lead - TRANSCRIPT

How Compassionate Accountability Helps Leaders Recover Capacity and Build Others Up

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Welcome to Victory Leadership, where good leadership leads to victory. Here we help emerging and established leaders win through clarity, confidence and growth. Let's get started.

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Welcome. Welcome to the leadership pit Stop where we help emerging and established leaders win through clarity, confidence and growth.

My name is Earl Airey with Victory Leadership and today we're going to talk about a leadership reality that many people feel, but may not feel safe enough to admit. Some leaders have no room to lead. And. And what does this mean? So let's unpack this a bit. Their inboxes are full.

Meetings just seem to keep multiplying like rabbits. Their priorities keep shifting. Their teams need support and their leaders need answers.

Their organizations want engagement, innovation, change, readiness, AI adoption, stronger performance, better communications, lower turnover. The list goes on and on and on. And somewhere in the middle of all that pressure, the actual practice of leadership gets crowded out.

Coaching gets delayed, one on ones get rushed. Recognition becomes occasional, appreciation becomes an afterthought, and delegation becomes difficult.

Reflection can disappear and the leader just keeps moving on. Sheer will or momentum, but not always leading. And that's what we're exploring today. The title of this episode is When Leaders have no Room to Lead.

How compassionate accountability helps leaders recover capacity and build others up. This is not a conversation about toxic leadership. Toxic leadership is real and it should be addressed when it exists.

But today we're talking about something a bit different. Capacity starved leadership. Good people are leading. Their intentions are to lead in these systems and these schedules, expectations.

And when they try to meet all of these, they it provides very little room to practice good leadership. So let's pull in today's leadership pit stop where we can be refueled and get ready to get back out onto the track.

So as we are racing towards our green flag moment and we're about to start today's race, good leadership requires more than just expectations. It requires a lot of things. But what we're thinking and what we're looking at here is capacity.

Leaders can care about people and they can still be overwhelmed. Leaders can believe in coaching and still have no room on their schedule.

A leader can value appreciation and still rush past those moments that should be acknowledged.

A leader can have the desire to delegate, but they are still struggling to let go.

A leader can support the growth and still fail to ask for the growth they need themselves. But that does not excuse poor behavior. But it does help to diagnose the problem more honestly.

And really, this is a problem that you can very easily frame as opportunity. Because many leadership breakdowns are not because of a failure to care. They are failures of capacity, courage, development and design.

Specifically, we're looking at capacity. But there are a lot of interconnected elements that contributes to how this may manifest itself in a healthy way.

And when leaders have no room to lead, the accountability can turn that pressure. It can turn into pressure. Instead of part partnership, many leaders carry that pressure quietly.

They, they may not say right out that I am overwhelmed or I don't know how I'm going to lead this situation, or that I need development and I need more clarity in coaching and time to focus, think I need support before this pressure spills over onto my team. And, and why is that?

Because some leaders believe they should already know. And that can come from so many different perspectives.

That can come from fear of exposing ignorance. Some may ask for help. They may think that makes them look weak.

Some believe that their job is to absorb this pressure silently, or that delegation is a loss of control. And if they believe that they cannot handle everything, then they may feel that they in some way, shape or form has failed.

So the pressure stays hidden. But hidden pressure rarely stays harmless. It often leaks. It can leak through tone.

It can leak through impatience, rational decision, unclear communications, emotional distance avoidance, over control through frustration. That's passed down to people who are already carrying their own responsibilities. And that is how the downward spiral can begin.

If the leader feels unsupported, then the team feels unsupported, the leader feels unclear, then the team receives unclear direction. The team feels pressured and the team experiences pressure. The leader lack, or the I should say the leader avoids asking for help.

And then the team learns not to ask for help either.

Eventually people disengage, not because everyone stopped caring, but because the care was not given enough room to become a part of the leadership practice. This conversation matters because the workplace is changing quickly. AI adoption is accelerating, expectations are shifting.

Many organizations are asking people to do more, learn faster, adopt sooner, and produce better results. But employee engagement remains a challenge. And managers must. They must remain central to how the employees are experiencing the organization.

And that is important because managers are often that translation point.

They translate the strategy into expectations, the change into daily work, organizational messages into team meeting, utilizing that AI adoption in a meaningful way, or trying to create clarity out of confusion.

So when managers, organizational leaders, do not have the capacity, the organization feels it, the employees feel it, customers feel it, the culture feels it. And that's why leadership capacity is not a solid soft topic. It is an operational issue, a human engagement change and trust issue all combined.

Let's introduce a phrase that I want us to kind of hold on to: compassionate accountability.

Accountability is often talked about as if it moves in one direction. The employee is accountable to perform and they are.

The employee is accountable to meet expectations and they are. The employee is accountable to deliver results and that is true and it all matters. But accountability is not a one way demand.

It is a two way relationship of responsibility. Employees are accountable for doing the work, growing the skill and asking questions.

They can communicate the needs and speak up when there is a lack of tools, clarity or resources to be successful.

Leaders are accountable for providing the client clarity, removing the barriers, securing those resources, developing people, and following through and asking their own leadership chain for what they need to lead well. Executives are accountable for designing systems where leadership is not treated as extra work, but as essential work.

Compassionate accountability does not lower the standard. It helps people meet the standard with support, clarity, and the capacity needed to succeed.

When accountability lacks compassion, it can become pressure. And when compassion lacks accountability, it can become avoidance. But when both are present, accountability becomes a partnership.

People can tell the truth about what is expected, and they can tell the truth about what is missing. They can also ask for that support that is needed and the responsibility that must be owned and that is a part of a healthier leadership.

All right, let's name the distinction. Clearly, toxic leadership and capacity starved leadership are not the same thing.

Toxic leadership may involve manipulation, intimidation, selfishness, dishonesty, favoritism, exploitation or repeated harm. Capacity starved leadership is different.

It may involve the leader who cares but is overloaded, who wants to coach but has no protected time, wants to develop their people but are buried in operations, wants to listen but is mentally exhausted, desires to delegate, but has never really thought about how to delegate well or have been taught how to do so. And the leader may want to ask for help, but there might be a little bit of intrepidation around what that request may sound like.

And again, this does not excuse the behavior that that harms people, but it does help us to respond more wisely. If the problem is toxicity, then it has to be confronted. If it's about capacity, it should be redesigned.

And if it's about capability, then we need to develop. If the problem is fear, it must be made safe enough to name. And if the problem is unclear expectations, we need clarification.

And if the problem is too much work with too little margin, then it must be addressed honestly. Because telling overloaded leaders to just lead better will only increase the pressure that they're going to pass downstream. So what can leaders do?

What can organizations encourage? I want to offer a victory leadership practice model called make room to lead.

In the room in lead are acronyms that have steps that are contribute to these ends. The first part room is about creating capacity. The second part lead is about using that capacity intentionally. So let's walk through it.

R is for recovered capacity. Leaders need time, energy and margin to think, prepare and decide and recover. Recovery is not avoidance, it's stewardship.

A leader who never recovers becomes reactive.

And if they never pause, they may confuse urgency with things that are truly important and they might not have the opportunity to reflect on patterns that repeat themselves that may contribute to harm, harm and harm. Trust in the environment. Recovering capacity may include protecting preparation time before a difficult conversation.

It may mean creating meeting free blocks. Imagine that block of time with no meetings and it may reduce unnecessary reporting. We don't want to have have paralysis by analysis.

Progress over perfection.

Cuz this may mean stepping away before responding to an emotional charge or even taking care of who you are, yourself, your presence, your your body, your your your physical, emotional, spiritual and mental health. Take those things into consideration so that you have enough sleep, your exercise, your meditation or prayer life reflection or just taking a walk.

You know some people take like a one author John Gordon. He talks about a gratitude walk.

Just take a short walk and just think about those positive elements that help to contribute to your outlook on elements of life that may help to contribute to replenishing that depleted energy.

Because a depleted leader may still make decisions, but they may not always be the wise ones.

So ask yourself what capacity do I need to recover before I can lead? Whatever this is that you're leading before you can lead it. Well then O the first O in room is to own the gap.

Leaders need encouraged to name what they need. I mean just take the courage. Let those decision makers and content providers let them know what you need.

These may include a variety of elements you know along with clarity, coaching, training, various resources, staffing, authority to make certain decisions. The the this is a non exhaustive flow list. You can probably find a dozen more things to add to it.

Because when leaders are suffering silently because they believe that asking for help makes them look unqualified in some way, shape or form.

It may not be unqualified, but they may not ask because a variety of reasons they think they may not get it, they think it might make them look a certain way or analogy. And those uncomfortable situations may encourage the person not to ask.

But pretending that this does not that this is not happening, it doesn't create capacity. It actually increases the risk.

Because owning a gap may sound more like I need more clarity about the priorities or I need coaching or on how to lead this change. I need support with this workload before it affects the team. So there are a lot of elements that may contribute to it.

And asking for these things is not a sign of weakness. This is actual leadership honesty. And it models something that is important for the team.

When leaders ask for what they need responsibly, they make it safer for others to do the same. The next O is be open for or open open the work through delegation. In delegation, it's not dumping.

Delegation is opening meaningful work to others so that they can grow, contribute and share ownership. Some leaders refuse to delegate because they are protecting quality. And sometimes that is true. But sometimes they are protecting control.

Sometimes they might be protecting speed. They can get it done faster if they do it themselves.

And at other times they might be protecting their own anxieties around the quality of the work that whoever they delegated to what that might look like in the end. But if leaders hold on too much, they can actually create bottlenecks. They may deny others the opportunity to grow.

And healthy delegation may ask what can someone else own? What decisions can be moved closer to the work? What task could become a growth opportunity? Or what must I stop carrying alone?

Because delegation creates room. And delegation is not an all or nothing.

It doesn't mean that you have to delegate every single piece of it, but just something that helps to alleviate some of the challenges, some of the burdens with competing elements that are in your schedule, where a little bit of a redirection of that energy can produce a greater return on that investment. And when you delegate, it also helps to communicate that you're entrusting these elements to another.

And not only does that help to build trust with the person that you've delegated those responsibilities to, but all of those who are observing this, they see that and it can have extended effects in the in the environment, in the department, in the organization, wherever that is you're leading. And then the m make leadership visible. Leadership cannot just live in good intentions. It has to show up on the calendar.

Because if coaching matters, then where is it scheduled? If recognition matters, how is it practiced? If development matters, then where is its protection?

And if reflection matters, then when is that happening? And if the one on ones matter, then being canceled every time something urgent appears kind of negates the, you know, the, the importance of that.

It just says that there's something else that's more important. And if there's something that's always more important then a reevaluation of what is occurring in the environment.

Environment may provide some insight as to how we can improve it in a more meaningful way that helps to build people up and not wear them out. Because many, many leaders say that people are their priority, but their calendars are telling another story.

And it's not that this is getting done maliciously. I think unintentionally this occurs because the squeaky wheel gets to grease or whatever is told to us.

That is the area that we need to focus on the most.

Then especially if it's senior leadership, then we feel a little bit more obligated or maybe in some cases a bit intimidated to actually follow through with those requests. Making leadership visible. It means putting the human centered leadership practices into a rhythm, into the rhythm of work.

So those one on ones, those coaching conversations, the recognition, the appreciation, the follow up, the planning, the listening sessions, even that bit of respite, just give yourself some time to think or giving others the opportunity so that they can do the same. As if leadership is always treated like leftover work, then people will experience it as an inconsistency.

So ask yourself what leadership practice needs to be protected space this week now we're going to move into the lead section. So the L listen inward. Leaders must listen to themselves. Not selfishly, but wisely. Your body might be trying to tell you something.

Same with your emotions. If you're experiencing frustrations, fatigue if you're avoiding something, if you're having challenge, keeping your patience.

Leading sustainability requires self awareness. Your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health matter immensely when you care for yourself and it shows others that this is important to you.

And then they will more likely want to follow your lead. A leader who ignores these internal warnings, they may eventually leak that pressure that they're holding on to onto others.

So listening inward will ask what am I carrying? What am I avoiding? What are these emotions that keep showing up? What's my current condition teaching me?

Because a leader who listens inward can be better prepared to lead outward and then. E stands for edify others and edify means to build up.

Leaders should be the builders of people, the encouragers of growth, the identifier of potential, coaching through the difficulties, advocacy for the development, celebrating of the progress, connecting with the dignity. They believe in the people before people believe in themselves. This does not mean avoiding accountability.

It means using accountability to build, not break. A leader who edifies others says, I see what you're becoming.

I believe you can grow through this here's the standard and here's the support, and your contribution matters, and let's work through this together. People often rise when they are both challenged and supported. And that is compassionate accountability. The A stands for appreciate. Intentionally.

Appreciation should not be accidental. Leaders need habits that help others notice what is good, good, meaningful and worthy of gratitude.

That may include appreciation, journaling, you know, just writing it down, one person each day whose effort should be acknowledged. And if you have a lot of people, hey, here's a perfect thing to delegate, you know, gotta build someone up to recognize that in others.

And you may have a.

Have an appreciation movement on your hands, but having that mindset, whether it's through journaling, so that you can follow back up with recognizing or appreciation in a timely manner, you may ask the questions to help determine exactly what the you know, what that looks like, what would that look like in practice?

Who helped to move the work forward, especially during a difficult time, or showed courage, stayed steady, they were very steadfast, they served quietly. They kind of like to be behind the scenes. But their contributions is just as valuable. And was any growth recognized? Did anybody grow through this?

And do. Do they know? Are they aware that their contributions mattered?

Because appreciation can help leaders develop more than just a positive and observant posture. It can also help people feel seen beyond their output.

Certain appreciation or specific, say specific appreciation can interrupt that emotional drain of constant pressure. It reminds people that their work in their presence matters. And then the D. The D stands for detect and discern.

But really to discern what is pulling a leader's attention away from what matters most. And not every distraction is useless.

Some things are helpful, but they're just poorly timed, you know, or they may be urgent, but the importance needs to be further identified. Some things may belong to others. Some things can be delegated. Some things can be delayed, reduce or release.

As detecting, discern means noticing that these are elements that are draining to leadership capacity and wisely deciding what we need to keep clarify, delegate, delay, reduce, release. We'll want to ask what keeps crowding out leadership? What consumes time but creates little value?

What am I carrying because I have not asked for help? What meaning habit, assumption or routine needs to be reconsidered? And what deserves my best attention right now?

This is not about eliminating everything difficult. It's about protecting the focus for what matters most. And there's another point we need to name, and that is professional growth needs room.

Leaders need to be developed direct reports need development specialists and executives.

Everyone needs investment and investment in the human condition in the workplace has the opportunity to pay incredible dividends when that investment is well made. Because if growth is optional and not a priority, it will often, often be sacrifice because it is a cost center.

It does carry an ROI, not in the traditional sense, but it can contribute to the bottom line. Like I've heard other leaders say, when there's the argument around investing in our people, are we just building them up so that they can leave?

And the response is, well, if we don't invest in them and they stay.

So how they feel connected to the organization can help to lengthen or to get a deeper ROI out of the investment investment into them as they continue to contribute to the organization, as the organization continues to contribute to them. That is the perceived organizational support element that I spoke of last time.

Because people may keep producing, but they stop improving without that investment. They may keep attending meetings, but they've stopped learning what's happening or going on. They're just moving through to the end.

And they may stop, people may stop responding. You want input, want suggestions, recommendations.

And if they keep, if they get into this, you know, this time of low investment, back into who they are, they may just be going through the motions. So they may act like they're responding, but they're. They're really not. They stop showing and stop growing.

And then in the confidence, their judgment skill starts to not only level off, but may start to decline slightly. The healthy organization doesn't only ask, what did you produce? But they're also going to ask, what. What are you becoming more capable of doing?

And that question matters at every level. So here's what the ask for the week is. So ask yourself, where do I need to make room to lead? Then choose one action.

It can be recovering capacity, owning a gap, delegating something meaningful, putting a leadership practice on your calendar, listening inwardly, building someone else up. Don't try to overhaul everything at once. And this is not an exhaustive list.

It just kind of goes over a little bit, what we talked about, you know, what I talked about here.

And if there is something that resonates with you, or perhaps there is something else that is on your bucket list, list something that you want to do, name it, own it, and claim it.

So if I'd say, even if you are not a formal leader, because I focus on emerging leaders, leaders who, you know, people who are curious about leadership, what is, what are the elements that

contributes to good leadership? How can I prepare for a leadership role as I develop my career?
So you don't even have to be a formal leadership in these elements still matter.

Where do you need room to grow? Room to think, room to recover, learn or contribute? Room to speak up about what you need to succeed?

So compassionate accountability belongs to everyone. And when leaders have room to lead, good intentions may not be enough. If it doesn't exist, the work will still move.

Meetings will happen, reports will be submitted. Metrics, they'll be reviewed.

One of the things I should say, several of the things that people may feel in the absence of real leadership is the lack of coaching, poor clarity, low support, minimal appreciation in the very presence of the person in their leadership role needed to help lead others successfully to accomplish the tasks and the goals and the purpose for why we're doing what we're doing in the first place.

Because good leadership requires capacity, courage and the compassionate accountability it requires leaders who are willing to ask for what they need and provide others what they need. It requires organizations that understand leadership is not extra work.

Leadership is the work that helps all the other work become healthier, clearer and more meaningful. So make room, room to recover, to grow, delegate, listen, edify, appreciate, discern what matters most.

Because when leaders make room to lead, they create space for others to become better too. Thank you for spending some time with me today. And don't forget, good leadership leads to victory and I will see you in the winner's circle.

Thank you everybody. Have a great day and take care. Bye bye.

Earle Airey

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