



TRANSCRIPT

Episode # 32: A Magic Formula For Managing Others (Part I)

You are listening to episode 32 of *Mastering The Power Skills*. What if every time we asked our team, or our peers, or even our boss to do something, they actually did it? They did it on time. They did it well. And they did it without you having to remind them all the time to do it. How much easier would your life be and how much more could you get done?

There is, in fact, a magic formula for making this happen a lot of the time. And it's a formula that any of us can learn and use. Join us in this episode so that you learn how to transform your work life in this way.

How much more could you accomplish if you were 25% or even 50% more influential and persuasive? Welcome to *Mastering The Power Skills*, the podcast that provides you with the tips, strategies, and the inspiration to grow your own power and win support for your ideas. And now here's your host, C-suite leadership coach Kathy Dockry.

Hi, everyone, and happy Spring. I know many of you are weeks ahead of me from a seasonal perspective, but here in Portland, Maine we're seeing increasing sunshine, and even the songbirds are coming back. I'm as busy as I always am, of course. A dear friend of mine has given me the nickname rocket ship. In that way, I bet I'm a lot like you. After all, you wouldn't be listening to a podcast called *Mastering The Power Skills* if you weren't a high achiever with some big plans.

But before we get started today, let me just give you a little reminder to every day stop for a minute or two and notice something about your surroundings. So for example, yesterday as I was walking to my car, I stopped for a moment to watch that songbird singing. And later, as I was running some errands, I pulled into a parking lot overlooking the ocean so I could spend just 10 minutes watching the amazingly deep blue waves crash on this rocky coastline that we have here.

I'm telling you to do this, not just because these things are deeply satisfying just in and of themselves, of course they are, and you know it. But when we high achievers are in rocket ship mode, we can forget to take these little moments here and there to connect with the nature around us. And we can keep on pushing it off until we achieve that common fantasy that we have, that fantasy of more time.

And, you know, pushing things off in that way actually prevents us from being the best versions of ourselves as leaders. We know from neuroscience that taking these little moments to observe something in nature actually resets and recharges those incredibly driven brains of ours. And these moments also play an enormously valuable role in helping us self-regulate and emotionally recenter ourselves.

It's also easy to do, really. And it's something that is always available to us. And we tend to forget about taking care of ourselves in that way. I know I certainly do. So consider this one of my periodic public service announcements, not only to you, but to me to take those breaks when we need them.

So let's get started on our topic for this particular podcast episode. I'm actually pretty excited to start exploring this with you because this particular skill that we're going to be talking about is something that can create a major transformation in your career as a leader. In other words, without this skill leadership is going to feel complicated and like something that requires a lot of effort from you.

And after you master this skill, leadership is going to feel much smoother. It's going to feel like you just put things in motion, like a new initiative or a major project, or a groundbreaking change. And after you put it in motion, it just naturally unfolds. So that's a pretty good feeling to have. That's where

we all want to get to as leaders. And let's dive into this topic with an example of how this issue commonly shows up for us in our work lives.

So, the other day I was talking to a coaching client who is relatively new to people management on a large scale. And she and her team have a big project they have to deliver on. And she's wondering how best she can ensure that everyone on the team is aligned and doing what they need to do without her having to check up on them all the time.

Because think about it, if she has to check up on them all the time the core tasks of the project will probably get done. But she won't have that much time to work on the big picture and to tweak the strategy whenever that becomes necessary during the course of the project. And she also won't have much time left to manage the relationships and the expectations with the CEO and the other management team members, all of whom are very invested in the outcome of this particular project.

Essentially, she's asking a question that we've all asked ourselves as leaders and managers, how do we balance the need to do things with the need to manage things? Ideally, we do that by having our team focus on the doing, while we focus on the area that only we can do as the leader, which is managing the process.

And that's the ideal, right? But, of course, easier said than done because even though we know that we need to balance our time in that way, somehow it ends up much more difficult than we want it to be. Stuff always seems to be getting in the way. And even when our teams are comprised of extraordinary people, those people don't always seem to perform at the flawless level that we want them to. We keep on getting pulled back into the weeds and doing a lot of the troubleshooting with our team.

So let me know if this resonates with you, here are some of the common feelings that we have when we're managing people in this way. And these are actual quotes from coaching clients who are good leaders, but they're struggling to get their team to perform at the level needed so that they, as the leader, don't have to keep on diving down and fixing the problems. So here are some of the quotes.

"It feels like I'm wading through mud." "Everything is taking twice as long to get done." And I've certainly had that feeling myself. Or this is another quote, "We're getting things done, but it feels like I have to drag everyone along with me." Or this quote, "This project feels like a perpetual exercise in herding cats." Or how many times have I heard this from a client, "We just dropped the ball, or we missed a deadline. And there's no good reason why that had to happen."

And here's another one that probably you've encountered and I've heard from clients, "There's so much unnecessary melodrama. No one seems to be managing the key relationships well, and I keep on getting pulled in to resolve political disputes."

Now, if any of those observations are resonating with you, then you know the price that gets paid when these things are happening. There's a personal toll that these things take on you as a leader. Things might end up getting done on time, and they may end up getting done well, but you're doing it with a ton of effort, grit, and personal determination. You're using your willpower to get things done. And this eats up your energy and it doesn't feel very good either.

And then there's actually a toll paid by the company as well when a project like this has these various things going on that you have to troubleshoot all the time. Things might get done, but over time they get done at a slower rate than they would have been done if they had been moving quickly, right, without the problems.

Sure, your particular project might get done on time, again, but that was at the cost of the energy and focus that you could have directed elsewhere. There were other opportunities to add value in your position that you didn't get to. And the same is true for members of your team. What things

did they have to put on hold because there was too much churn being created around this project?

So the very real price to the company when things don't happen smoothly is that overall everything slows down. We don't necessarily see that bigger trend over time. And we don't necessarily think about it, but it's true. It is a simple law of nature.

But here's the exciting thing, this law actually works in reverse. If you manage people in a way that adds clarity and gets them all aligned, and enables you to spot problems quickly and efficiently, then you actually speed everything up. In fact, there is a simple formula for doing this. And in study after study the benefits of managing people in this way, according to this formula, are really very remarkable.

First, there's less of an emotional toll on you as the leader. You don't get pulled down into the weeds as much and you can focus your attention on activities that will give you a higher rate of return for your investment of time. You'll be making good use of your time.

Secondly, your team gets more stuff done in less time. So things speed up. Essentially, what you've achieved by using this formula is a higher rate of

productivity. And it's a special kind of productivity, the kind that feels effortless, versus the kind that's a grind.

So at this point, you're probably saying, "So what exactly is this magical, simple formula? Because I sure could use more efficiency and productivity in my work life." So here's the actual formula. It's clear expectations plus firm accountability equal less friction and better caliber results.

So let me give you that formula again because each part of it really counts. Clear expectations plus firm accountability equals less friction and better caliber results. And now, I can hear you saying, "Really? Is that all it takes to get better caliber results with less friction? I'm not buying it." And I kind of know you're saying that because I've had many, many clients say the same thing to me over the years.

Heck, I've even said that about myself when my team is failing to deliver in a way that I'm expecting them to do. It always looks much more complicated and complex when that happens. It doesn't look at all like the sort of thing a simple formula can solve. So let me walk you through some of these common objections I've heard from my clients and explain why they don't actually hold up.

The biggest objection is this, we are absolutely sure that as the leader we know how to give clear direction. I bet you are thinking that to yourself right now. Except, here's the thing, we're also absolutely wrong about that.

I do this little exercise with leaders, and I also do it with myself sometimes, where we review exactly what the leader actually said. And there are always, always a few instances where the leader either left something out or was a little vague. That always happens. And why does that happen?

Well, it's because we're seeing things so clearly in our own heads that we're sure that the other person is seeing it, too, with that exact same clarity. But often they're not. This doesn't mean they're not intelligent. It's just part of human nature to process words in different ways and to have different sets of assumptions.

So if you, as the leader, haven't made a checklist of the things that are important to executing the job well, and then communicated that specifically to your team, then you haven't removed the risk that the person doing the job might have reached some different conclusions. And in contrast, how much better would things go if that person was completely aligned with you and saw the road ahead in exactly the same way that you do?

Another objection I get about this formula is this, I get the part about setting clear expectations. But my company culture doesn't provide me with the tools to hold people accountable. Now, definitely we know companies that are like that. You may have experienced that yourself. But this still isn't a really great objection because it contains a flawed assumption.

The assumption is that the time to start holding people accountable is when things start going wrong. But instead, you can actually build accountability into the process at the time you communicate your expectations. There's a neat little approach to doing that that I can share with you later on.

And finally, another objection that I hear from clients about the magic formula is that it doesn't take into account all the uncontrollable and unexpected stuff that can impact our projects. So just as a reminder, the magic formula is clear expectations plus firm accountability equals less friction and better results.

And sometimes my clients will say, well, that's just a formula. It doesn't cover the inadvertent mistakes, or the political twists and turns, or the cultural misunderstandings. You get it, you can probably create a laundry list of all the unexpected problems that you've encountered when you've been leading a project.

And yes, the magic formula doesn't totally eliminate the messiness that happens when you have a group of completely different people trying to work together. But the formula does improve things substantially. The formula removes the dysfunction that you can control. And that means when the uncontrollable dysfunction arises, as it sometimes does, that is so much more manageable. You can resolve it faster. The uncontrollable is less likely to knock things off course substantially.

And using the formula substantially dials down the sort of finger pointing and blame assignment that happens when problems arise in a project. We've all been there. And it's a good thing to eliminate that as much as you can so you can actually focus on productive problem solving.

Okay, so I've given you the magic formula for managing others so that you get better caliber results with less friction. But it's still a little bit general, I would think, in your mind. How do you get super skilled at using the formula so that you get the results that you want? Well, I can definitely help you with that.

I'm going to give you some easy-to-follow guidelines so you can become a superstar at doing the formula. And I'm not exaggerating when I say that. I've been studying the people who do this sort of thing well for a long, long time. There's nothing about what they're doing that's hard or challenging

for any of us to duplicate. We simply have to slow down a little and be a little bit more thoughtful and disciplined in how we're managing our team.

Because doing this well is such an important part of being a successful leader, we're actually turning this topic into a three episode series. I want to be sure you have all the tools that you'll ever need to do this well. So this first episode has been all about what the magic formula is and what it can do for you.

Our next episode is about how to become a master at setting clear expectations. I'm actually going to provide you with a downloadable checklist that you can follow to train yourself to always be very clear and specific, no matter who you're managing or dealing with.

And finally, our third episode will be about how you can more smoothly and more efficiently hold people accountable. As I mentioned before, one of the most helpful ways of doing this is to start setting up your accountability process at the time you're setting your expectations, not waiting to do that when things start to go wrong. If you set up your accountability process upfront, you'll be so much better prepared to deal with the questions and problems that arise regarding accountability later on in the project.

So there you have it. And while our next episodes will give you so many helpful tips about the magic formula, there's no reason why you can't get started on getting better and better on this right now. You'll certainly see a payoff if you do.

The way I got started using it a long time ago was by simply deliberately and intentionally noticing what I was doing when I communicated my expectations to my team. It was kind of a humbling experience to see how much I left out that would have been helpful for them to know.

And I wasn't leaving stuff out because I was negligent or not being thoughtful, by the way. It's just that my mind moves so fast. Remember, I just told you about my friend who has given me the nickname rocket ship. And that's pretty accurate about the way I operate, in ways both good and bad.

When I started paying attention, I noticed that my mind was already so far ahead on thinking about the project that I wasn't doing a good enough job deliberately describing to my team all the details that I had already processed earlier in my mind. When I slowed down and started describing how they should do things, not just what they should do, the team started getting more and more aligned and I saw big jumps in productivity, even from the people who might have been weaker or less experienced members of the team.

So even without the detailed checklist that I'm going to give you in our next episode, you can get started on noticing what you're doing right now and where you can be more comprehensive in describing your expectations. And in the meantime, here's to an awesome week ahead, and I'll see you in our next episode.

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