

Project Management and Leadership: Equal Partners for Project Success

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Part II Leadership and the Project Professional

*“Leadership is the art of accomplishing more
than the science of management says is possible.”*

“A Leadership Primer”

General Colin Powell

Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (Ret.)

Review

Let's have a quick review.

In Part I of this article entitled, “The Four Project Management Processes of Leadership and Management”, I said that Leadership is charged with *Producing Change*. In this part we will address the avenues available to us as leaders to meet this responsibility.

The 8 Primary Leadership Qualities

What characteristics are possessed by great leaders? Studies have shown that great leaders are:

Intellectually Stimulating

Those who report to you expect you to be ahead of the game. They expect to be challenged by you in ways they may have never been before. Subordinates must have the perception that you are more experienced and know more than they do about managing a successful project. Because of your position as project manager you are seen as being at the top of the chain of command. Because you are there subordinates expect a certain amount of mentorship. They expect to be able to learn from you, not only professionally but emotionally and spiritually as well.

Energetic

You must be physically fit. Your energy level must be high especially during times of crisis. You must maintain an optimistic “can do” attitude. Others tend to feed off the energy level of their leaders. Challenge your subordinates to keep up with you. You are responsible for setting the pace and tone for the project. Do it with vigor!

Self-Confident

The most important principle to remember here is “Never let 'em see you sweat.” A lack of self-confidence is as detectable by human beings as blood in the water is detectable by sharks. You will be devoured. Self-confidence is enhanced by knowledge and preparation. Follow the scout motto here and “Be Prepared”.

Assertive

A position of leadership is no place for the faint of heart. Being assertive does not mean being overly-aggressive. However, it does require you to establish and maintain a pro-active attitude. In that mode one does not wait for problems to come to them. By that time others are aware of the problems. This can sow seeds of doubt about you're being on top of things. You want to minimize that perception as much as possible. You should therefore actively engage in an on-going process of evaluating each area of the project for potential problems and risks. You should then act quickly to address any you find.

Dominate

Beware! There are those who will challenge your authority as project manager. This usually occurs within a functional or weak-matrix organizational structure. The challenges can be subtle. A comment here, a remark there. Sometimes it can be as bold as publicly undermining your decisions and plans. You must not allow this type of behavior to continue. It will only diminish your credibility and erode the respect of your subordinates and stakeholders.

When this situation occurs, a closed door session is in order. You should approach the session from a position and attitude of strength. This is no time to be condescending. You are still in charge of the project not your challenger. Your purpose is twofold. One, you want to determine the nature of the challenge. Is it personal or professional? Two, whatever the cause you want to leave the session with the absolute understanding that you are in charge. If that understanding cannot be reached then you should move to the next level of conflict resolution.

If the challenger is a superior and a resolution cannot be reached, it may be in your best interest to remove yourself as project manager. This may seem drastic but you cannot be successful without the public support of senior management.

If the challenger is a subordinate and a resolution cannot be reached than discipline of that individual is the responsibility of the functional manager. The bottom line here is that you are in charge of the project, period. You are the one who will be held accountable for its success or failure.

Motivating

You need to know enough about your subordinates to be able to push the right buttons. This will require a little additional work on your part. You can start by determining their personal and professional interests. Scan their work area. Are there pictures of family? Hobbies? Recreational interests? Sports teams' pennants? Posters? Plants? Magazines? An employee's work area can give you a very good indication of what they're about as individuals. There's always something that you can use to initiate a conversation and establish a rapport.

Make a mental note for each team member. If you have a particular interest in any of these things, be sure to say so. In addition, you need to determine what human needs you should address with each individual. This can be done by simply engaging in one-on-one conversations. These conversations need not be formal or regularly scheduled. They should however, be a part of your leadership strategy.

Honest

Nowhere is the saying, "HONESTY is the best policy" more applicable than in a position of leadership. People have expectations of their leaders that they themselves aspire to. They also demand the highest standards of their leaders and honesty tops the list. There was a time when a person's word or promise was enough to establish a contract or a business relationship. Those were times when the virtue of honesty was held in high esteem and practiced more. We as leaders need to understand that it is still held in high esteem.

We also need to understand that honesty carries a lot of weight along with integrity, and respect. When our honesty is questioned, our integrity and the respect of others is not far behind. If we lose these our days as leaders are numbered. So, be honest in you dealings with superiors as well as subordinates. It may be unpleasant at times but it's best in the long run.

Charismatic

We all know people who can make things happen just by being involved. When their name is mentioned everyone else jumps on the bandwagon. They have a way about themselves that makes us feel good about ourselves. They have charisma. We may not know exactly what it is, but we know it when we see it and we know who has it. The greatest leaders throughout human history have had it. We as leaders of today still need it. Is this a special gift or can it be developed? I believe that this is an area where every human being has some potential.

I view charisma as the ability to influence the thinking and attitudes of others. To do this we must project an image of certain characteristics. These characteristics include the seven previously discussed leadership qualities. Add to those a true commitment to make these qualities a greater part of who you are as a person and you will have charisma.

Leadership Styles

What are the primary leadership styles?

Autocratic

At some point in time in our careers we've all encountered this leadership style. This is the style that says, "Do it my way because I 'm the project manager and I said so." Although this leadership style may not be popular in today's warm and fuzzy, politically correct mindset there is a time and place for it in project management. This style is most appropriate at the beginning of a project. This is especially true in environments where professional project management guidelines are unknown or have not been followed.

These environments are not disciplined and you no doubt have been hired to instill some project management discipline. If you were to take a look at the history of such environments you will find projects that were cancelled do to cost over runs and client dissatisfaction. Those that were completed were late, over budget and/or did not meet customer expectations. Some of them may still be in a high maintenance mode. Senior management has seen the error of its ways and has decided on a change in strategy. You have been brought on board as a part of

that new direction. You are in charge. Don't be hesitant about exerting your influence and authority.

Consultative

This is a more moderate leadership style. The leader shares problems and gets client, subordinate and senior management input. However, the important thing to remember here is that the leader retains the decision-making role. We must be aware that it may not be in our best interests to use this style as our dominate one. It should be used in conjunction with a more autocratic style as the project progresses and you have set the pace and tone of the operation. In adopting your personal leadership style consider the following proportions: 75-80% Autocratic and 20-25% Consultative.

Group

Based on my suggested leadership style proportions stated above, you probably already know that this is not a leadership style that I recommend. However, there is a place for it. This is the leadership style used when planning the office holiday season party or the family vacation. In this style the leader shares problems, obtains input and seeks a consensus. The leader then accepts the group's decision. An instance where the project manager considers this style is concerning issues of scope conflict resolution between stakeholders.

Even in this scenario the project manager must have a suggestion or two for resolution of the conflict. Base your suggestion(s) on the primary customer's best interests. Focus on the constraints of time, scope, cost, risk, quality and customer satisfaction. Be sure to prepare a solid case for your suggestion(s). Remember, although you may be seeking a group consensus you don't want to abdicate you position of authority and influence.

Conclusion

For project professionals, the art of Leadership is every bit as important as the science of Management. We must practice both disciplines in order to achieve the level of professionalism demanded by our clients and their increasingly complex business environments. The key word here is "practice". We must be aware of the when, where and how aspects of effective leadership techniques and use them appropriately. We can do this by making leadership a conscious part of our everyday professional activities. Remember, **perfect practice makes perfect.**

About the Author

Ruffin Veal III has been an Information Technology professional for over 30 years. He has had increasing levels of responsibility throughout that time in such private sector industries as manufacturing, retailing, banking, medical and others. During that time he has also been employed both full time and as a consultant with such public sector employers as the State of Minnesota and Ramsey County, Minnesota.

“During that 30 year period I have been what I call an “in the trenches” professional. That is, one who has relied on resolving problems encountered by all IS/IT professionals with practical “non-perfect world” means. There are a lot of theories out there but I've found that nothing beats knowledge based on experience.” says, Veal. “Most advice given by many consultants and speakers is either too costly, too time consuming or just downright impractical. The presentations are great but the listener has little to take back to the office and implement in a quick, affordable manner. He/She has even a smaller chance of seeing any short-term return on investment.” “Emphasis on real world information technology solutions is what you will see in my presentations”.

Ruffin Veal III is an author, speaker and President of Ruffin Veal & Associates, Inc. an information technology consulting firm specializing in organizational leadership & management, project management and client relations.