



## You Can Become a Powerful Project Leader by Taking These Steps

### SUMMARY

#### PROJECT LEADERSHIP TAKES GUTS.

Face it, you take on some of the most complex assignments and are responsible for large budgets, resources, and operational impacts. You are asked to make it happen in some extremely challenging circumstances. With all of this responsibility, you need to be a powerful and effective leader. The steps outlined in this article will enable you to tap into your leadership potential, engage your teams, and utilize proven techniques for successful project outcomes.

- Identify powerful leadership styles
- Be the manager
- Determine what makes a leader effective
- Put your knowledge into practice
- Use resources at your disposal
- Be understood
- Shape the project

#### Identify Powerful Leadership Styles.

- "An army is a team. It lives, sleeps, eats, and fights as a team." – *General George S. Patton, Jr.*
- "When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!'" – *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Now, you may think that these leaders are a bit extreme for project management, but these statements are the embodiment of how to rally a group with a common goal and lead it to success. Think about leaders who have inspired you and the attributes that have made them influential. Use those attributes to your advantage. I utilize General Patton's success for the ability to make a team feel empowered to make smart decisions that move a project forward. Dr. King's approach enables me to reach people on an emotional level, getting to the core of their abilities and rallying them as one unit.

#### Be the manager.

#### Once you have determined the type of leader you want to be, be it.

Be the manager that you are proud to be—the leader that others seek to manage their projects. Determine your style. Be it soft spoken, but assured; persistent and goal driven; demanding without being pushy; or passive enough to let your team make decisions and provide input.

Recognize your potential by soliciting feedback. This is eye-opening and can really aid in assessing your strengths and areas for improvement. It has to work for you though. Soliciting feedback without taking action will undermine the people who take the time to provide input.

What makes powerful project leaders is the ability to proficiently work with a group of individuals at various levels and skills. Be inclusive and listen to each team member. Try letting others lead meetings and take notes. This empowers them in the project process. Also, ask team members what you can do for them to assist in meeting project deliverables. Often, resources may not get results because they are having trouble scheduling resources for a meeting that you could organize for them or they may have been assigned another task that you may be able to have reprioritized.

Inspire people to be their very best; give positive reinforcement. Always thank people, even for small achievements. Recognize them for making progress and completing tasks on time. It may just be their job, but you will be rewarded with their admiration and they'll want to reach higher goals for you. Lead by example. You must be knowledgeable, organized, approachable, and reachable at all times. Your actions set the tone for the rest of the team.

Let people feel safe confiding in you. Be as straightforward and honest as you can. If you know something is not going well, let management know. Let the team know that changes need to happen to improve outcomes. Everyone has competing priorities and additional responsibilities; let them know you understand and that you want to account for this in your scheduling to make them successful. Add resourcing risks to your plan and determine how best to mitigate them, while also reviewing these risks with your stakeholders so they understand and recognize the impacts.

Continually include people in project participation. Some people are quiet in meetings, so you need to seek them out and request their input. This is also inclusive of management. It is often difficult for them to attend lengthy meetings when you may need just a few minutes for their input. Seek 15-minute, one-on-one sessions and you will likely receive worthy responses.

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## Determine what makes a leader effective. Powerful leadership starts with you.

Resolve problems before they get out of control. If you know a deadline is approaching and tasks are outstanding or a decision has not been made which is critical, take the steps to make it happen. Reach out to task and issue owners and inform them of the project consequences. Raise the concern to management and stakeholders if you are not getting the results you need. Sometimes, you do have to take one for the team. As a leader, if things are not going well, own it. Make sure you state it as an issue and move on. You will earn respect in the process.

With all of this responsibility, it's important to remember how special you are. Leaders need high self-esteem. Pick something that gives you motivation. I have a rock that has "Energy" engraved on it. A little item, but when things get tough, I hold it and gather strength from it. There is also a quote by Patricia Ryan Madson that keeps me going. "If you can't get out of it, get into it." Push harder through the rough times and don't give up.

## Put your knowledge into practice. Start with kick-off meetings.

This is a perfect time to set the stage for success and activate positive energy in team members. The more detailed and concrete your information is, the easier it will be to evaluate progress as time goes by. Perform midterm project reviews assessing what is going well and what needs to change, what we are really good at, and how to keep doing this well. Always perform recommendations at project conclusions. Lessons learned are so impactful if gathered and documented appropriately. Determine what team members enjoyed most about this project and try to incorporate those items in the future.

## Use resources at your disposal. You have means you may not have considered.

- **INTERNAL THOUGHTS:** Thoughts are private until you express them. It's time to think for ourselves and put our minds' rantings into appropriate actions.
- **FEELINGS:** Our emotions have to be acknowledged and controlled. We can't let anger or frustration be taken out on team members or result in unsatisfactory actions.
- **WANTS:** It's easy to lose touch out of fear and repercussions. There is always trepidation when asking for resources when you believe they will be denied. Ask anyway; you may just get them.
- **OUR VOICE:** This is the ability to comment on what we see, hear, and think. Express without emoting. Keep information factual and opinions in check.
- **RISK-TAKING:** This is our ability to "GO FOR IT!" If General Patton or Dr. King had not taken risks, they would not have reaped the rewards. The risks have to be understood and the outcomes must be desirable.
- **ELIMINATE NOISE:** "When I'm drivin' in my car and that man comes on the radio and he's tellin' me more and more about some useless information supposed to fire my imagination..." – *Mick Jagger and Keith Richards*. Get satisfaction—avoid unnecessary information. It clouds judgment and causes confusion.
- **RECOGNIZE SIGNALS:** "Sign! Sign! Everywhere a sign, Blocking out the scenery breaking my mind, Do this, don't do that, can't you read the sign?" – *Five Man Electrical Band*. Make sure information is clear and concise and not contradictory. Check the sources of information by validating with stakeholders, customers, and technicians.

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## **Be understood: Make sure team members know what you are communicating.**

Make eye contact with people. Repeat information to be sure you and others are in agreement. Share interpretations by speaking in terms the audience understands. Lend clarity to technical information for customers. Ask questions of customers to be sure their requirements are understood. Review documents and require others to read them. If you don't feel they are being read, have sessions where you review the information. This is an extremely effective way for participants to ask questions and make revisions. Listen carefully and respond appropriately.

Center yourself spiritually and physically. Have your mind sharp, and energy level high. Yoga, as I've learned recently, is an excellent method of grounding yourself. When leading meetings, seat yourself in the center of a group to be able to see everyone and be heard by all. Make sure the phone is near you for clarity for those on conference calls. Show poise and confidence at all times.

## **Shape the project: Mold your project's context.**

Begin with setting appropriate scope. It is imperative that you have all stakeholders and team members review, approve, and buy into these critical items. This sets the stage for all project deliverables. Conduct a risk assessment. It's amazing how engaging your team in identifying risks early in a project and developing mitigation steps will keep your project on track. Be sure to have an approved budget of time, funds, and resources. Keep a close eye on budgeting constraints and continually assess where budgets are. Ensure stakeholders and management are always aware of the budget status. No matter what tool you use for scheduling, be sure it is comprehensive, inclusive of predecessors and contingency, and vetted, viable, and up-to-date. Solicit input of completion percentages from all team members and make them cognizant of task deadlines as this will guide the progress.

Frequently assess modifications to your project as there is no constant like change. Have a defined process for approving project changes. Update and modify all information and communicate the changes to all involved. Keep forging ahead. Don't let change stifle or halt progress. Work smarter by repeatedly adjusting dates, budgets, and resources to maintain accurate information. Keeping everyone informed of current project details will improve team communication.

## **So do it! Become a powerful leader.**

Discover your leadership style and build highly motivated teams. Encourage problem solving and develop effective relationships with stakeholders and team members. Utilize consistent project management methodologies to make your project successful and enjoy it.

**Remember: "Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work." – Aristotle**



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