



Project Leaders Fail

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From the novice project manager to the more seasoned PMP® (Project Management Professional), garnering a successful project is not always easily attained. Moreover, leading today's complex projects has become a monumental task requiring only the most experienced and committed individuals. Leaders from various diverse backgrounds now face an unprecedented combination of circumstances from workforce anxiety, economic uncertainty and shifting political and business conditions all requiring you to make difficult decisions yesterday.

But what many individuals seem to overlook when evaluating the reasons for project failure is the failure of leadership.

What is Leadership?

Oddly enough the most direct and applicable definition for "leadership" can be found in a document called "*Patrol and Troop Leadership*" which is published by the Boy Scouts of America for Troop Leaders. They define leadership as "a process of getting things done through people. The quarterback moves the team towards a touchdown. The senior patrol leader guides the troop to a high rating at the camporee. The mayor gets the people to support new policies to make the city better."

In short being a true leader is all about the basic ability to connect with and get along with a variety of people at any one given time.

What Makes a Qualified Leader?

An article in CIO Magazine by Edward Prewitt, stated that the top reason for leadership failure as determined by 250 senior IT individuals was Poor Interpersonal Skills. This skill is considered so valuable among leaders of projects that the Project Management Institute (PMI®), the recognized authority on project management practices, has made Communications Management one of it's Nine Knowledge Areas.

But strong communication skills are not something that is easily learned. Many believe that you either have it or you don't. While there are occupations that do not require a great deal of "people skills" the role of a leader is not one of them.

But leaders today are recognizing that Emotional Intelligence is the new benchmark when measuring a leaders effectiveness. Expanding upon the teachings of better Communication Skills, Emotional Intelligence is your ability to acquire and apply knowledge from your emotions and the emotions of others in order to be more successful. In late 1998, a Harvard Business Review article entitled, "What Makes a Leader" was released and caught the attention of many senior managers and leaders across all industries. The article pointed out the importance of Emotional Intelligence in leadership success, and cited several studies that revealed it's often the distinguishing factor between great and average performers.

A major part of a leader's role consists of being a mentor and coach to those he or she leads. And one of the most critical responsibilities a leader faces is selecting the right managers for your organization. The strength of your managerial staff will ultimately determine the fate of your organization.

However, all too frequently, employees are hired with limited skills to properly perform their job effectively. Promises are made for increased training and skill building, yet many times that promise is never fulfilled. Employees wander around an organization with an uncomfortable disadvantage, causing not only their work to suffer but their chances for advancement as well.

Coaching provides a powerful opportunity for the development of your most important resource: your people, and builds the character of a leader to be more effective. Allowing new managers to fail is demoralizing to them and directly affects the rest of your staff negatively. Employees look to their managers for inspiration and guidance and allowing staff members to fail sends out a message that the leadership is simply not there.

The success of managers is not only important to the organization but to your career advancement as well. Senior functions of the organization will look at the morale and success rate of those you lead to find out just how effective you are in your position. Advancement only comes to those that know how to treat others to help grow the business.

How Leaders Can Become More Effective

One of the most difficult things to do for anyone in a position of authority is to question their abilities. Many of us believe that the learning process stops after we receive our Masters Degree or Doctorate, but learning is never ending. Limiting ourselves to believe that we have all the answers will only hinder our development as effective leaders in a complex business world.

Here are six questions that every leader should ask themselves to help further themselves and rejuvenate those working under them:

1. How is that working for you?

There is no excuse to NOT know how you are doing as a leader. 360 Degree feedback sessions are imperative to the success of a leader. Evaluations done by employees can be valuable in revealing issues that you may have no idea exist. Have an open mind and allow those opinions to be heard. Only then will you be able to lead more effectively.

2. Where are you vulnerable?

There are numerous behaviors and "derailers" that can diminish the credibility of a leader. Don't find yourself giving employees a reason to ever say that you were a poor leader. Some examples include arrogance, melodrama, volatility, excessive caution, habitual disgust and aloofness to name a few.

3. Do you analyze the adversity you are facing?

Learning from our mistakes is simple in theory but its not always easy to first identify the problem. Listen to those around you who might be questioning your decisions and ask why they might be doing so. Is it out of rivalry or have they hit upon something that you didn't see? Listen, analyze and learn before moving forward.

4. Do you listen to your customer?

Your customer or end user may not always be a pleasure to deal with, but in the end they are the ones you are looking to please. Look at every interaction with your customer as a mini focus group where you can learn something you may not have known before thus helping to be more effective at producing the results they are looking for.

5. Do YOU have a mentor or confidant?

Reverse Mentoring is a concept that is rarely used but can be highly effective. Learning from your employees about what it's like to work in their environment will only help you lead them more efficiently. Sometimes the point of view from a younger, inexperienced worker can bring to light issues that you just may not have seen or wanted to see. Everyone can profit by being mentored by someone.

6. Do you force yourself to change?

Young or old, change is never something we are accustom to. No one is except from improvement, however it does take courage to admit a change is needed. Change will only force you to do things better.

In closing, leadership is like the foundation of a house. Without it there the structure would simply not be able to effectively stand on its own. Without the proper leadership in an organization, your employees would aimless wonder around in every direction never doing any one thing well. Today organizations must develop and learn from best practices regarding leadership. They need to develop cultures that foster and inspire performance pride and yes even fun! The relationship between employee and employer while different must be present to further ensure communication, effectiveness and commitment.

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