

FIRST STEPS

“Newbies” (and even some veterans) can gain a leadership edge by avoiding some common errors.

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Less-experienced project managers sometimes struggle with how to be an effective leader. Here’s a starter list to get you up to speed quickly and avoid some common pitfalls. Seasoned project managers may also want to review the list as a refresher. After all, none of us ever stop learning.

Walk around. You’ll discover and resolve more problems by getting out and engaging with team members and other stakeholders rather than operating primarily from behind a desk.

Resolve conflicts. Confront any problems professionally and in a timely manner so they don’t fester and harm the project.

Trust, but verify. Strive to build trust among project stakeholders, but insist on metrics, checks and balances and other tools to ensure outcomes are being met.

Question the status quo. Challenge practices, processes and methodologies. And when it’s needed, change them to yield better business outcomes.

Get out of the way. As the project’s overall leader, you shouldn’t be tied down in its critical path. Instead, you must be accessible to help those members in need.

Don’t make it personal. It’s just business; behave in the best interests of the business.

Don’t run the project by consensus. Collaboration is important, but it’s your job to make sure the best approach is always chosen.

Celebrate successes. Mark a major milestone with team members every three months at least. It shows that you care and appreciate their work.

Manage to your top three problems. Predominately focus on managing to the most important and urgent issues every day. Your overall effectiveness here has a direct bearing on the success of your project—and your career.

It’s about results. Effort is important, but results are essential.

Make your boss look good. As a project manager, you have two bosses: your immediate boss and your project sponsor. Your job is to cover their backs and ensure their success.

Clearly define roles and responsibilities. Team members perform far more effectively and reliably when they know what’s expected of them.

Learn from the past. A great start to any new project is reviewing the lessons learned in similar past efforts. Then, you and your team can apply relevant lessons to the project at hand.

Seek out a mentor. There’s no better way to learn your craft than by tapping into the treasure of knowledge, wisdom and experience around you.

Maintain a great attitude. Your attitude permeates across the team. You are expected to support, inspire, encourage and give hope.

You can become an effective leader, but first you have to learn how to behave—and then behave that way. *PM*

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