

REALITY CHECK

There are tell-tale signs of a strong leader—as well as a weak one.

BY NEAL WHITTEN, PMP, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

As disheartening as it might be to admit, weak leadership is far more pervasive than strong leadership. To get at the weak spot, it helps to examine the common myths about what it takes to be an effective leader:

THE MYTH: It's better to sit on the fence than make a decision someone won't like.

THE REALITY: Make decisions that support the business but tap into the intellectual capital of the team to help ensure the best outcome.

THE MYTH: Worry more about mistakes made than the people who made them.

THE REALITY: Caring more about the individuals involved will build loyalty and lay the groundwork for a stronger team.

THE MYTH: In a world of facts and figures, following your instincts is old school.

THE REALITY: Instincts are every bit as powerful today as they ever were. Problems fester when you don't listen to your gut.

THE MYTH: Complaining is good—it shows you care.

THE REALITY: Complaining is negative energy and wasteful, unless the person doing all the grumbling either directly informs the person who can solve the problem or brings a solution.

THE MYTH: Escalating an issue over someone's head is bad business.

THE REALITY: Escalations are healthy and an essential tool to ensure the best business decisions are being made as soon as possible.

THE MYTH: Integrity and ethics are mostly for "wusses."

THE REALITY: Integrity and ethics aren't optional—they're indicative of your character. As the old saying goes, "Listen to the whispers of your conscience as if they were shouts."

THE MYTH: It's okay to accept substandard work from others if they're doing the best they can.

THE REALITY: Falling below standard is never acceptable. Build in processes that help ensure satisfactory work, such as clarifying objectives, assigning a mentor or buddy, and adding early checks and balances.

THE MYTH: Overload yourself with work to set an example for others.

THE REALITY: Do not become the critical path on a project. You must be available to stakeholders who require your attention.

THE MYTH: Bring your ego to work—the passion will help you be more effective.

THE REALITY: It's not about you. It's about everybody and everything else. An ego will only trip you up and make you less effective as you focus more on where the ideas come from rather than on obtaining the best business solution.

THE MYTH: Manage your day by the plethora of interruptions that come your way.

THE REALITY: Manage to your top three priorities or problems for each day. They define your value and contributions—and your career—as you focus more on the truly important and urgent issues.

THE MYTH: Organizational processes and methodologies should always be strictly followed.

THE REALITY: No methodology satisfies all the needs of its users. Tailor it to fit the business needs of your project.

THE MYTH: Professionally mature people do not need to feel appreciated.

THE REALITY: Everyone likes feeling valued, no matter what level they're at. Morale and dedication also benefit, which can, in turn, lead to improved productivity.

THE MYTH: You're not responsible for the quality of a deliverable you're dependent on.

THE REALITY: You must be at least partially accountable. Otherwise, the deliverable will be of unknown quality, which can place your commitments at risk.

THE MYTH: You are what others perceive you to be. Their vision of you becomes your reality.

THE REALITY: Only you have power over you—no one else. You become who and what you choose to be.

THE MYTH: Avoid conflict at all cost.

THE REALITY: Some conflict is inevitable as we work to resolve project issues. Never avoid necessary confrontation.

THE MYTH: Your boss is responsible for your career.

THE REALITY: Your superior should help you reach your potential within your organization or company. But in the end, you're accountable for your own career.

THE MYTH: Your job is not to make your boss look good, but to make yourself look good.

THE REALITY: Actually, your job is to focus on making your boss look good—which, in turn, makes *you* look good.

We need to look at ineffective behaviors and thinking patterns to better understand our own performance, because ultimately you're the one who makes success happen. It's not acquired through luck, accident or lots of hope. It's the direct result of deliberate choices and actions. PM

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