Make It Happen

True leaders take charge.

BY NEAL WHITTEN, PMP, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

The most effective leaders do not subscribe to destiny. You won't hear them saying things like, "It was meant to be." They know successful projects happen because you make them happen.

Everywhere I travel, I come across "leaders" who believe they have little or no say in achieving the outcomes they desire. I hear grumblings such as:

- Management won't support me when I ask for help with a difficult team member.
- The project sponsor won't support the use of contingency buffer in the project plan.
- The client won't effectively participate in the project cycle.
- The vendor says it's on time, but continuously delivers late and with low quality.
- I have little control over the culture within my project or organization.
- I have little or no control of my workday.
- I have no control over the performance of project members or staff.
- I have the responsibility, but not the authority.

After encountering scenarios such as these time and again, many "leaders" allow themselves to become complacent. You may even seek employment elsewhere, where you perceive these problems will be handled better. However, when you switch to the new company, a gigantic revelation will occur: The same problems exist. Why? Because you are the problem. Yes, you!

If you weren't willing to take the initiative to correct problems that affected your domain of responsibility before, you won't at the new company, either. You'll wait for management and others to fix the problems for you, but you could be waiting a long time.

You're probably far better staying with a known entity where you have invested time and intellectual capital, and deciding to be part of the solution. Instead of playing the victim, you can be the catalyst for significant change in your project, organization or company—if you want to.

I hear "leaders" give the excuse, "But there is nothing I can do!" And they say it with a confidence and conviction intended to win over the listener. But it is rarely true.

What are some actions or behaviors you can adopt when you run into obstacles?

- Articulate the problem; propose the solution; and be very specific what you are asking others to do.
- Clearly state the impact if you don't get the help you require.
- Hold people accountable for their commitments.
- Ensure a plan is in place from which progress can be routinely tracked.
- Escalate the issue to closure.
- Demonstrate accountability.
- Enlist a qualified mentor.
- Reevaluate your project plan as news requires.
- Don't dump problems upward. Be willing to personally champion their closure.
- Recognize you're accountable for the performance of those under your direction as it applies to your project and organization.

Francis Bacon, English philosopher and statesman, fittingly said, "A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds." If you really want to make something happen, you can almost always find a way; if you don't, you will find an excuse. Your job is to lead, regardless of that which is happening around you. **PM**

Neal Whitten, PMP, president of The Neal Whitten Group, is a speaker, trainer, consultant, mentor, and author. His latest book is Neal Whitten's Let's Talk! More No-Nonsense Advice for Project Success.