About Successful Project Leaders

Terry Little
Overview

• Personal Thoughts
• In the Beginning
• Planning and Learning
• Moving Forward
• Dealing with Threats
• Summary
Leader’s Role

• Providing a Mandate, Sense of Urgency
• Creating the Vision and Setting the Goals
• Fostering Alliances
• Reinforcing, Motivating and Protecting
• Assuming Responsibility and Being Accountable
• Dealing with Barriers and Disruptive Influences
• Institutionalizing and Developing Future Leaders
Thoughts About Project Leaders

• Most in Leadership Positions Aren’t Leaders

• Leaders are Most Essential in a Project’s Early Stages

• Leaders are Rarely Leaders in Every Context

• True Leaders Exhibit Moral Courage

• Most Leaders are Self-Developed

• Leaders Focus on People and Outcomes – not Process and Techniques
Wrong-Headed Approaches to Developing Project Leaders

- The “List” Approach
- “Be Like Me” Approach
- “Off-to-Training” Approach
- “Sink-or-Swim” Approach
In the Beginning – Shaping Project Culture
Establishing a Team

A group of people in a collaborative relationship working toward a mutual goal -- a goal that dominates all other individual and sub-group goals -- a goal for which every team member is mutually accountable.
The Big “T” Word

- Trusting is Hard
  - It Makes us Vulnerable
  - It is Counter-Cultural

- Teams Without Mutual Trust are Not Teams

- Being Trusted Fosters Trustworthy Behavior

- Distrust Should be Earned

- The Untrustworthy and the Distrusting Should Go
Nurture a Winning Spirit

“I was too weak to defend, so I attacked.”

Robert E. Lee

Winning comes from having a bias for action and a penchant for risk-taking
Having Realistic Expectations

“A man’s reach should exceed his grasp else what’s a heaven for.”

Robert Browning

Be ambitious is setting goals, realistic in expecting results
Planning and Learning
Challenging the Status Quo

“Cautious, careful people, always casting about to preserve their reputation and social standing, never can bring about a reform.”

Susan B. Anthony

Radical ends demand radical means
Plan a Little – Adjust a Lot

“Lee didn’t follow my plan. Not my fault”

George McClellan

Execution, not plans or process, determine results
Fostering Ownership and Moving Forward
Ride to the Sound of the Guns

Lead and communicate eye-to-eye
Turning Followers into Leaders

• Encourage Risk Taking
• Demand Accountability
• Emphasize Execution
• Provide Feedback
• Insist on Excellence
• Reward Initiative
Dealing with Major Threats
Deal with Barriers and Obstacles Ruthlessly

Patience is not a noble virtue when dealing with disruptive influences
Changes

• Untimely or Unnecessary Changes Can Doom a Project

• Controlling Changes is a Major Leadership Challenge
  – Requires Courage to Say “No”
  – Requires a Process to Explicitly Address Cost and Schedule Impacts

Dilbert
by Scott Adams
About Moral Courage

• Doing What’s Right Even (and Especially) When it’s Not Popular or the Boss Wants Otherwise

• Deciding What’s Right Demands:
  – Bravery
  – Principles
  – Confidence Which Derives from Thinking and Reflection
Conclusion

- Being a Successful Project Leader is Tough Stuff