



Leadership Guide

A guide to improving your leadership skills and personal competencies as a project manager

Stay true to yourself, and your profession will stay true to you.

Are you feeling a bit lost within your project management profession? Does it seem like you're stagnating in the same cycle of frustrating problems? Burnout, too many projects, endless politics, etc... Are you given full accountability for project outcome, but little to no authority, resulting in a project team that takes out its frustrations on you? Today's hectic project environment calls for:

- Strong personal competencies
- Self-awareness
- Leadership skills that work in spite of the authority gap (heavy responsibility for project success, minimal authority)

This MyProjectAdvisor™ guide will take you through the steps of building your leadership skills, so you can **get more out of your project management profession** and take it where you want it to go. Find the leader in you!

MyProjectAdvisor™ Leadership Guide Outline

- Step 1 – Establishing Direction and Commitment
- Step 2 – Acquiring Leadership Behaviors and Learning to Assess Them
- Step 3 – Practicing Your Leadership Repertoire
- Step 4 – Serving Your Community

Step 1

✚ Establishing Direction and Commitment

Before you can know how to get somewhere, you must first know where it is you want to go. For example, to train for a race, you don't just start running. First, you must decide what kind of race you want to train for, how long you have to prepare, what your goal time is, develop a workout plan, etc. Then, in order to keep yourself motivated you must be committed, that is, you must convince yourself of a reason for training and commit yourself to the plan.



This same scenario can be applied to your project management profession. You must know your destination before you build a plan to get there. You may know what leadership skills you need or which behaviors you want to change, but change isn't going to become a reality until you *establish direction and commitment*.

Leadership and personal competency are best learned by experience, rather than from a teacher in a classroom. Workshops can jumpstart your leadership growth experience by helping you define your unique plan. Developing leadership skills for the demanding project environment goes much deeper than classroom training, templates, and workbooks. It is a process that you yourself must manage, aided by guidance and direction from others. Changing attitudes and behavioral patterns takes time, and growing your personal competencies is a continuous learning process.

As much as it is good to be guided by others, they cannot change your behaviors for you; you can go only as far as you *want* to go. Evaluating yourself objectively takes courage. But if you can find the courage to be *convinced* of your need for change, *committed* to making those changes, and *open* to receiving objective feedback, you will be well on your way to getting more out of your project management profession.

Personal competencies by their very nature require you to adapt your style to particular situations. For example, what one client might view as confidence, another might see as arrogance. Or, some people are more willing to open themselves, while others are more inclined to be demanding, still others more contemplative. What comes more naturally to some is a struggle for others. As a project manager, you must learn to develop an awareness of your personal competencies and how they relate to other styles so you can make your profession all you want it to be.

There is no one-size-fits-all way to striving for project management superiority; the journey is just as important as the destination. The journey prepares you for greater leadership opportunities and a more rewarding experience.



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How to establish direction and commitment:

- 1. Decide what you would like to experience more of, and what you would like to experience less of in your profession.*
- 2. Evaluate your current professional reality, assessing your strengths and weaknesses. (self-assessments, 360 reviews, net promoter)*
- 3. Develop your guiding principles, and align them with what is really important to you. What motivates you? What do you want to accomplish? What is holding you back?*
- 4. Test your convictions. What are your attitudes toward risk? Write a mission statement for your profession. To what extent are you willing to commit yourself to the goals you have established for yourself?*
- 5. Begin to build an action plan for the coming weeks, months, and even years.*

Before you begin to make any changes, you must evaluate your current reality, decide where it is you want to go, and then commit yourself to getting there.

Now that you know what **you** want out of **your** profession, it's time to figure out what **you** need to get there!

Step 2

+ Acquiring Leadership Behaviors and Assessing Them

Project manager competency can be easily and effectively visualized by the competency pyramid shown to the right. Seasoned project managers most likely already have a solid foundation to build upon – **project management knowledge** and **subject matter expertise**. Personal competencies go above and beyond these levels to **trust-based relationships**, **consultative leadership**, and **courage**.



If stakeholders find you difficult to work with or hard to get along with, it hardly matters how much knowledge or subject matter expertise you have; they will not *trust* you. Trust-based relationships resonate positive energy throughout the entire project team, going far deeper than the usual purely rational business relationships. Benefits of trust-based relationships include:

- Being asked for advice
- Having your recommendations followed
- Respect
- Forgiveness for mistakes
- Being involved earlier on in the project

The trust of your stakeholders must be earned, and earning trust is not simply a matter of what you know, or what you have done before. Rather, important behaviors are required to quickly establish these relationships in today's demanding project environment. These behaviors require self-awareness, feedback and continual practice until they are made into a habit. However, they can be broken down into components so as to be more easily understood and practiced.

Trust-based relationships are built when a project manager expresses knowledge in a credible manner, consistently demonstrates a pattern of acting reliability, linking intentions to actions, and shows a willingness, tempered by prudence, to develop deeper relationships with stakeholders that go beyond pure business and deepen the commitment each have to help the other succeed. To achieve these results, a project manager must make their stakeholders, including team members' priorities, their highest priorities. In a diverse environment, one routine does not work for everyone; self-awareness and awareness of others' behavioral styles are crucial to adapting your behaviors to those around you in order to consistently develop trust-based relationships.



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Understanding Leadership skills assessment

Unlike project management knowledge and subject matter expertise, personal competencies are very difficult to objectively measure. A project manager striving for superiority must:

- *Make developing trust-based relationships a priority*
 - *Thirst for constructive feedback*
 - *Learn how to use tools to assess what their skill levels are in these areas*
- *Conduct frequent self-assessments on personal competencies such as 360 degree reviews, peer assessments and behavioral assessments*
 - *Incorporate feedback into their continuous leadership development experiences and plan*

Trust-based relationships are the foundation on which all other personal competencies must be built. If your stakeholders do not trust you, they will not let you lead them. If you are not leading them, you are at risk. It is really that simple. Learn how to develop trust-based relationships and develop a plan for practicing these skills and learn how to assess and re-assess yourself for continued professional growth.

Step 3

+ Practicing your Leadership Repertoire

As a project manager, do you find that you are often given full accountability for a project outcome, but very limited, if any, actual control? Do you feel as if you are trying to **lead without express authority**? Fortunately, this is possible. Once you have learned how to build trust-based relationships with stakeholders, you can lead them without express authority, through **consultative leadership**. Achieving results with these leadership techniques leads to increased job satisfaction. Helping others achieve their goals, which align to group goals, is tremendously rewarding. We all have a desire to help and serve others.

Consultative leadership is the next logical step after building trust-based relationships; when stakeholders trust you, they are more willing to listen to your advice, hence you are more able to lead them without express authority. Project managers must learn how to become authentic trusted advisors to their stakeholders, customers, and team members.

Consultative = giving advice

Leadership = guidance, direction

Therefore, a consultative leader is one who directs through giving advice. Consultative leadership is not based on power, title, or expertise; it is a process based on giving advice to those you are leading in order *to serve their best interest*. Consultative leadership is similar to *servant* leadership, because it entails putting the needs of those you are leading ahead of your own interests. Your job is to guide and advise, so that they have the tools they need to make good decisions for their project.



Advising is a critical skill for project managers, but unfortunately if it is not approached correctly it can turn the entire process sour. *No one likes to be told what to do*. When advice is given properly, it reduces anxiety for the stakeholders and generates positive energy.

As the project manager, it is your job to educate the stakeholders on their options, facilitate communication, and artfully suggest what you see as the best course of action. Emotions are key in project management advising. As the advisor, you must be tuned in to stakeholders' emotions. How people feel about what they are being asked to do is critical to getting them aligned in support of a common goal. Before you give advice, make sure you do the following:

- Suppress your own ego – this is not about you
- Make sure you have earned the right to give advice (trust-based relationships)
- Take note of stakeholders' emotions

The art of advising

There are four basic steps to the advising process, and all of them are critical.

1. Explore options with the advisees
2. Educate them about their options
3. Give them a recommendation
4. Let them choose

The last step is in many ways the most difficult and the most important. The ability and willingness to relinquish control of the final outcome is at the heart of true consultative, servant leadership. However, this helps your team take more ownership, and helps stakeholders become more vested in the outcome and thus more committed. Your power, influence, and ability to handle more work grow exponentially across your projects.



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Following the templates of the PMO is not enough to make you a superior project manager. Growing personal competencies to extend your leadership capabilities is critical in today's environment. Personal competencies have to do with attitudes and behaviors, and it takes time and effort to change ingrained behavioral patterns. You must learn to look for opportunities to practice your leadership skills.

- *Every time you communicate with a stakeholder is a chance to build your trust-based relationship with that individual*
- *Practice speaking with credibility*
- *Keep reading and learning*
- *Look for opportunities to serve and advise*
- *Become a better listener*
- *Find workshops that include hands-on exercises that reinforce what you learn and provide practice tools to help you implement your Plan*

Now that you have learned what it means to be a consultative leader, you can share what you have learned with others. It is time to **get more out of your profession** by **Giving Back** to your community.

Step 4

+ Serving Your Community

Servant leadership means putting the interests and needs of your client before your own. But it also means giving back to your professional community – other project managers. Just as you have learned from other project managers, they can learn from you, and you can find fulfillment in helping and teaching others. Find ways to connect to a global community of project managers, where you can find a mentor, become a mentor, and share ideas and discussions. Communities allows you to connect with your professional peers and join them in their efforts to move the entire project management profession forward, one step at a time.

Learning through teaching

Numerous studies on learning and teaching styles have been undertaken in recent years. And they all point to learning through teaching as the method with the highest retention rate. In a study conducted by National Training Laboratories, it was reported that after 6 weeks we will retain:

- 5% of what we learned in a lecture
- 20% of what we learned in a lecture enhanced with visuals
- 75% of what we learned by experience
- 90% of what we learned by teaching others

This is yet another reason that makes servant leadership so powerful – not only is it what is best for the customer, but it is of great benefit to you as well. By giving back, you will learn more as well.



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If project management is to continue to have tenure as a profession, there can be no more 'every man for himself'. We must learn that one person's success does not necessitate another person's failure. We can all learn together, and work together, to build a better future for our profession.

- *Find a community*
- *Connect with other professions regularly about your leadership skills and personal competencies*
- *Seek ways to engage in dialogue with others about the challenges of leading in projects, dealing with diversity, and adapting yourself to unique situations and personalities.*
- *Offer to help someone with their personal competency development*

Are You Ready?

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