

The Most Successful Project Managers Do This

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I won't make you read all the way to the end to get the answer: they communicate effectively and aren't afraid to do so through conversation. This one trait will determine the success of any project manager responsible for any project. No two team members are the same – this you know. Like any personal relationship you have – from parents and children to friendships – how you respond and motivate

individuals on your team will greatly differ; successful project managers are able to do this with effective communication skills. Effective project managers have to be able to communicate with all types of people – because that’s just what they’ll get on their team. Detailed versus big picture. Creative versus technical. Introverted versus extroverted. The following skills are signs of an effective PM who can communicate successfully:

- **They are the team translator.** I’ve been in situations where two team members with opposing views are having a debate that eventually turns ugly. One side gets angry and says something about the other person that is pretty negative. I just smile and say, “I think what they’re trying to say is…” and restate the argument in a less inflammatory way that hopefully helps to bridge the gap. It’s important to remember each individual has a different perspective and approach. A good PM recognizes this and doesn’t favor one approach over another but can help translate those differing approaches within the team.
- **They seek to understand the individual.** Another crucial aspect of communication within project teams is that you have to be comfortable talking to everyone. Each member on your project team has a preference of how they want to be spoken to. Some people you can speak to in a very straight-to-the-point way, and they’re OK with that. In fact, they enjoy it. I spent six years in the navy, and the communication style was very direct, to say the least. I have to remember that just because that was my experience, and it worked OK for me, that doesn’t mean that style will work for everyone on my team. It helps to remember who they are and what their personal situations are – to the extent that they’ve shared in previous meetings and project kick-offs^[1]. As a part of this, what motivates each individual is also very personal. Knowing what motivates and how to interact with people is key. These PMs show genuine interest and concern; as a result, they earn loyalty and engagement from each of their team members.
- **They create a safe environment for honest communication.** No one wants to communicate that they need more time, or that they haven’t been successful with an activity or assignment. But the sooner that information can be communicated, the quicker things can get back on track. You’ve got to be able to talk that person off the cliff who’s stressed out because they have an activity on the critical path that is going to be late. You have to say, “Listen, it’s all right. It’s going to be okay. As a team, we will analyze the plan to see how we get that time back.” There’s no benefit in beating that person up about the bad news because they probably can’t fix the issue, or they already would have. Use words like *we* instead of *you* or *I*. It’s all about *we*. How are *we* going to get the time back?

- **The communicate frequently through conversations.** At a minimum you have to communicate on either a weekly or biweekly basis. This is driven by the necessity to make the needed course corrections to the project plan. We build a plan today that we believe is going to get us where we need to go, but by tomorrow, that plan will need to change, because something will be different. Maybe somebody is sick or has been called to jury duty or perhaps we realize that we missed an activity. Since the project plan is static, we have to make periodic course corrections as we go to ensure we remain on track to achieve our goals.

How a PM communicates involves so much more than the act of speaking and directing. True leaders listen, inquire, respond, motivate, and recognize in a way that not only speaks to each individual team member, but helps those team members work more effectively with one another. Learn by tuning into my podcast, [The Conversation with Clinton M. Padgett](#).

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