Seize the Leadership Moment

By Ron Taylor

Project managers in the real world may not have as much power as those in the PMBOK Guide, so seizing opportunities to influence others can often be the difference between success and failure.

Benjamin Franklin had a gift for seeing what others missed and for creating opportunities where others saw only obstacles. On one occasion Franklin used a leadership moment to turn an adversary into a lifelong friend. When he was seeking a second term as clerk in the Pennsylvania Legislature, he was opposed by a wealthy member who supported another candidate for the position. Franklin won the job, but knew he had created an adversary.

Knowing the wealthy man took great pride in his library, Franklin wrote him a note asking to borrow a rare, valuable book. Although the man did not like Franklin, he was obliged by social convention to loan him the book.

Franklin read it and returned it a week later with a note complimenting the man lavishly on his good taste in literature, and expressing his undying gratitude and appreciation for the man’s generosity.

Franklin used an opportunity – a leadership moment – to gain not only the man’s respect, but also his cooperation. The next time they met, the man spoke to Franklin “…as he had never done before, with great civility, and afterwards manifested a readiness to serve me on all occasions…” according to Franklin’s autobiography. Having established a trusting relationship, Franklin took advantage of every opportunity to nurture it. Over time, the man not only continued to support Franklin, but remained a lifelong friend.

I am not suggesting you start borrowing things just so you can return them, but I do suggest you recognize that although your power as a project manager may be limited, your opportunities to influence others may be more plentiful than you think.
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Ron Taylor is an internationally-known leader, lecturer, author, and consultant, and the principal and founder of the Ron Taylor Group. Ron served as President and CEO of a 10,000-person organization (PMIWDC) and was named Leader of the Year by the 500,000-person Project Management Institute (PMI®).

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