

Positive Leadership in Project Management¹

Positive Leadership in Project Management - The Key to Achieving Extraordinary Results²

By Frank Saladis, PMP, PMI Fellow

Successful project management practitioners are a unique group of people who possess extraordinary skills, have enormous amounts of patience, demonstrate competency in many areas, especially leadership, and will probably agree with the following statement: “the duties of the project manager may be extremely challenging, but the challenge is the factor that drives them achieve success.”

The project manager position requires a balance of managerial and leadership skills plus some business knowledge and a dash of miracle worker. A quick analysis of the state of project management today and for the foreseeable future indicates, with very few exceptions, the following trends:

- Larger, more complex projects
- Higher and more challenging strategic business goals
- Greater responsibility placed on the project manager
- Less availability of resources
- Tighter timelines
- Greater cost constraints
- Increased customer demand for quick and reliable execution
- More focus on risk management
- Enhanced emphasis on organizational brand recognition
- Project management as a competitive factor
- Value metrics
- More emphasis on “leading indicators”
- Cross-over of traditional waterfall project management and Agile techniques (Hybrid project management)
- Technology advances in IoT and A.I.
- More focus on managing and leading people through Emotional Intelligence

¹This article is one in a series on Positive Leadership in Project Management by Frank Saladis, PMP, PMI Fellow, popular speaker and author of books on leadership in project management published by Wiley and IIL in the United States. Frank is widely known as the originator of the International Project Management Day, the annual celebrations and educational events conducted each November by PMI members, chapters and organizations around the world. Learn more in his profile at the end of this article.

² How to cite this paper: Saladis, F. (2020). Positive Leadership in Project Management - The Key to Achieving Extraordinary Results. *PM World Journal*, Vol. IX, Issue I, January.

After reviewing this list, I think most seasoned project managers would say without hesitation; “been there, done that” or, for many practitioners, “still there, still doing that.”

The career project manager accepts these demands and plans a strategy that will guide him or her through the many trails and challenges that can be expected. Part of that strategy is to continue developing leadership capability. Leadership, like quality, is not a destination, it’s a journey and one can expect to encounter many tests along the way.

A statement expressed many years ago by McDonald’s CEO Ray Kroc helps us to understand a little more about leadership and to assist us in developing a strategy for success. He said “Happiness is a by- product of achievement”. If an employee has pride in what he or she has done, and the work is recognized by management, that employee will become a willing and enthusiastic part of a winning team. Project managers need a winning team and effective leadership is the key factor, regardless of project size and complexity.

It is extremely important for people to be proud of what they are doing and how they are contributing to the end goal. The leader of the team, you, the project manager, must create an environment where pride, success, and loyalty come together in the form of a highly motivated and capable team. The question is, how do we create that high performing team? One answer is through “Positive Leadership.” You may be asking -What exactly is that? Positive leadership, the focus of this series of articles, is an approach that addresses and builds on what people do well and what their strengths are. Some leaders believe that the best way to improve performance is to focus on developing weak areas. That focus actually detracts from the ultimate goal – greater performance. Effective leaders who observe the skills and talents of their team seek to build on those skills and talents. The natural result is the continued development of the individual’s most useful and benefit producing skills. The by-product is the development those skills that have not been targeted. It’s similar to the Pareto Principle – “the biggest bang for the buck”. Focus on building existing strengths and the weaker areas will also develop. Let’s call it “**The Pareto Leadership Principle**”. It’s a win-win approach for everyone.

According to leadership experts, a positive leadership approach that includes well-grounded principles and techniques will promote desired outcomes such as: employees thriving at work, enhanced interpersonal skills development, virtuous behaviors, emotional intelligence, energized workforces and teams, and organizational loyalty.

Positive leadership is something that could be described as a formula for success. The positive leadership formula may include the following ingredients:

- One part imagination
- One part innovation
- One part education
- One part mentoring
- One part self confidence
- One part pride in oneself
- One part knowing your people and their needs
- A large portion of commitment
- Some passion,
- A healthy amount of instilled pride.

You have probably heard the saying “catch someone doing something right.” That is the essence of positive leadership.

A colleague and I were recently discussing trends in leadership from 2001 to the present. Our mutual concern was described in this question: “Is the 21st century marking the beginning of the end of nice guy leadership?” It seems that many of today’s influential people are letting go of basic principles such as respect, listening to others, and looking for alternatives that might reduce a conflict or minimize the pain of a necessary decision. The situations gripping the world today, have been, in many ways, created by so called leaders who simply looked away from the needs of their constituents. I sincerely hope this is not what new leaders will aspire to emulate.

Positive leadership is about setting an example, treating people fairly, and allowing new leaders to grow through mentoring. It allows them to experience growth through challenge, encouragement, and an occasional failure. Although we don’t encourage people to go and fail, positive leaders provide the guidance and wisdom about taking chances and not to fear failure. A quote I often use – “Failure is a detour on the road to success.

Consider your leadership style and think about what you can do to create a more positive environment for your team or your organization. Leadership is not a popularity contest and I am not suggesting that you become everyone’s pal. Leaders inspire people, they grow new leaders, and they look toward the future. The leadership journey is far easier to travel when you have followers who respect you, support you, and offer assistance when you need it. Become a positive leader. I guarantee it will be a big plus for you!

About the Author



Frank P. Saladis

New York, USA



Frank P. Saladis, PMP, PMI Fellow is the Owner/Founder of Blue Marble Enterprises Inc. and Project Imaginers. Frank is an accomplished leader and contributor in the discipline of project management. He is the author of 12 published books, the past editor of the All PM Newsletter and the author of over 160 project management articles. Frank provides training and consulting internationally and has educated and entertained countless audiences with a special blend of project management knowledge and tasteful humor. He is also an experienced and well-known project management instructor and consultant and a member of the PMI® Seminars World team of trainers. Mr. Saladis' 35 year career includes 28.5 years with AT&T, 3 years with Cisco Systems, and more than 25 years as a professional trainer, facilitator, mentor and keynote speaker.

Frank is the Originator/Founder of International Project Management Day which launched in 2004 and has been growing in recognition yearly. The goal of International Project Management Day is the worldwide recognition of the many project managers and project teams in every industry including nonprofit organizations and health care who contribute their time, energy, creativity, innovation, and countless hours to deliver products, services, facilities, and provide emergency and disaster recovery services in every city and community around the world.

Frank was PMI's 2006 Person of the Year. Frank is a Project Management Professional, a graduate from the PMI Leadership Institute Master's class, and has contributed significantly to the organization's growth and knowledge base for more than 20 years. His leadership activity within PMI included the position of President of the New York City PMI chapter from 1991-2001, President of the Assembly of Chapter Presidents, and Chair of the Education and Training Specific Interest Group. He received the high honor of the "PMI Fellow Award" in October 2013 and received the very prestigious "PMI Distinguished Contribution Award" in October 2015.

Frank can be contacted at saladismp@msn.com