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*Professionalism and the Project Manager*
*Positive Leadership in PM*
by Frank Saladis

# Positive Leadership in Project Management [1]

# Professionalism and the Project Manager [2]

## By Frank Saladis, PMP, PMI Fellow

Project managers and those with similar titles and roles are placed in leadership positions. They are selected for the assignment, in most cases, because they have demonstrated an ability to "get things done." It is a reputation that has been earned through perseverance, dedication, and a willingness to go the proverbial extra mile. This requires a very well-balanced approach that combines effective management and strong leadership to meet the objectives of the project and to ensure the team remains engaged and motivated. Part of that balance requires the project manager to present a consistent and professional image to all stakeholders.

Professionalism in project management can be defined as a set of values, behaviors, and characteristics demonstrated by the project manager and carried forward by the team. The key point here is the leader sets the tone for the team and influences the behavior of the team. The values, behaviors, and characteristics of the leader are the essential factors that will drive the team to provide extraordinary service and high-quality products to stakeholders. A consistent display of professionalism can create a positive project environment, enhance team member commitment and gain greater support and acknowledgment from executive management, clients, and other key stakeholders. Consistent demonstration of professionalism is not only observed by customer and clients, it drives the organization to greater levels of business success.

With a great degree of confidence, I believe that most project managers spend a fair amount of time gathering information about best practices in the project management community, discussing lessons learned with team members and peers, or observing other leaders in action, to further enhance their leadership abilities and professional image. The

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[1]This 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.

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following tips, gathered from many sources and personal experience, will help to further advance the professional image and brand of those in leadership positions and within an organization's project management environment.

1. Professionalism begins at the leadership level. If you are leading a team, department, division or an entire organization, set expectations early and intentionally. This is extremely important at the start of a project or as a new role begins. Expectations should also be revisited often due to the frequent changes that most organization experience in the business environment. Review the organization's code of conduct or guiding principles and emphasize the importance of achieving excellence through teamwork, collaboration, and professional conduct. As a leader, display the characteristics you desire to see in your team members. Establish yourself as a resource and focus on the development of your team while you emphasize your vision and mission. Create a desire among your team members or within the organization to create value every day.

2. Focus on the "little things" that can make a difference, such as being on time for meetings, (especially the meetings you schedule) being completely prepared for meetings, maintaining a clean, orderly and safe environment, treating others with respect, acknowledging good work through sincere recognition, and interacting with composure, respect, and dignity most importantly during disagreements and conflict situations.

3. Managing conflicts can be challenging, stressful, and can lead to highly uncomfortable situations. Maintain professionalism by avoiding emotional responses. Listen carefully to the concerns of the people involved and focus on facts, not on opinions and speculation, to avoid further emotional escalation. Use good judgement and, when necessary, discuss issues in private to prevent unnecessary attention and intervention by people who may actually aggravate the situation. The professional project manager understands that he or she is highly visible to many stakeholders. The behavior displayed by the project manager in a conflict situation will affect how clients and other stakeholders perceive the leadership capability of the individual and possibly the organization.

4. Professionalism is often associated with education, personal dress and appearance, style of communication, awareness of others' needs, and etiquette when attending meetings or conference calls. Consider your environment and your stakeholders. Dress accordingly and respect the norms established by your organization. Communication, whether formal or informal, is a critical factor for the professional. Maintain awareness of what you are communicating and to whom. Make sure you have current information, avoid spreading rumors, use proper protocol when communicating (keep in mind the cultural diversity of your organization and business environment) and make sure you follow the

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approved organizational procedures when communicating sensitive or proprietary information. Proper etiquette is extremely important especially during first time introductions. People generally respond favorably to good manners, respectful communication and conduct.

5. Most organizations have established rules, procedures, and policies or some type of code of conduct or ethics. The professional project manager should be aware of these and ensure that they are followed. If there is a question or concern about a policy or rule, the concern should be communicated to the appropriate manager or the originator of the policy.

6. Managing change - There is usually a process for submitting changes to an existing policy or procedure. If there is a disagreement regarding a rule or procedure, ask questions and obtain an understanding about why it was established. In many cases a policy or procedure is established for specific reasons that are not communicated to the general population. Make sure people know a policy has been created and ask for input and suggestions before simply implementing a new policy. During project implementation, a mutually agreed upon change control procedure should be established and followed by all stakeholders to prevent issues such as scope creep and surprises from developing that could result in conflict.

Every organization has its own definition and perception of what professionalism is. A brief definition might be " the combination of all the qualities that are connected with trained and skilled people." Take a close look at yourself, your team, and your organization. Determine your level of professionalism. Where are the opportunities for improvement? Where are you providing superior service? Do you deliver the level you expect when you are the customer? Just like quality, professionalism is a journey with continuous improvement as the guiding factor.

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## About the Author

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**Frank P. Saladis**, PMP, PMI Fellow is the Owner/Founder of Blue Marble Enterprizes 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.

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