Top Five Communication Skills for Project Managers
~ By Jo Ann Sweeney

Research among project managers globally identifies top communication skills for leading teams.

Leading people - the experiential side of project management - is as important as task-based skills according to project managers in Europe, the Middle East, India, America and Australasia.

In recent research, they said that communication is a critical skill for project success, both for keeping team members up-to-date and for winning the support of key stakeholders.

But which skills make all the difference? Here is what the top five respondents say have made all the difference in their careers.

1. Active Listening

In first place is our ability to listen to and understand others. Listening to the words and the meaning behind their words, not interrupting or letting our minds wander, asking questions to check understanding and observing non-verbal signals.

According to Indian project manager Nirav Patel, CAPM (Certified Associate in Project Management), “The benefits include getting people to open up, and due to that lots of misunderstandings and conflicts can be resolved.”

2. Building Relationships Based on Trust and Respect

Trust and respect are the cornerstones of personal relationships. They are earned, not a right, and come from an experience of our honesty, integrity and expertise.

Among the characteristics people used to determine our credibility are truthfulness, openness, willingness to share ideas and information freely, consistency, reliability, loyalty, capabilities and competence.

“Trust encourages people to propose ideas, suggest ways to enhance work, speak about their concerns and give advice,” says Dubai-based Kareem Shaker, PMP (Project Management Professional).
3. Setting Clear Priorities

In third spot is a project manager's ability to convey the strategy for their team - by setting goals, planning and prioritising. We call this the what, who, when, where, why and how of the project. Team members should understand both the big picture and the lower level technical priorities.

“Essentially this is what a project manager does. If you can’t do it you won’t get everybody working on the same page,” says Australian Paul Rasmussen.

4. Enabling Collaboration

In a collaborative environment, team members support and encourage each other rather than focusing solely on their tasks and responsibilities. They are willing to co-operate and share information, ideas and assets to help each other. The result can be greater than the sum of its parts.

“When we collaborate, we get the 1x1=3 effect. Things happen that might not have if people had remained focused on their work,” says American Adam Michaelson, PMP.

5. Conveying the Organisation's Vision

Explaining the bigger picture helps team members understand where the project fits within the overall aims of your business unit and organisation. Senior executives focus on the triple bottom line - finance, environment, reputation - this is where they expect your project to make a difference.

American Jhaymee Wilson, PMP says, “As project managers, if we can't convey the link between our project and the organisation, how can we show we are delivering value?”

This article is from research among project managers around the world and published as Five Essential Rules for Project Leaders on the PMI Career Central website.

Jo Ann Sweeney is a communications consultant who helps project teams win the support of their sponsors, senior executives and end users. Jo Ann wrote the Article “Top Five Communication Skills for Project Managers” and recommends you visit Sweeney Communications for more information about communication skills.

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