

Principles of Project Leadership

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Principles serve as guideposts or beacons that help you stay on course with your project. Let's review seven principles of project leadership.

Principle number 1: People own what they participate in creating. When team members work together to create a project plan and then monitor and control the project, they take ownership not only for their own work, but also for the project as a whole.

Some projects leaders fear losing control of the project if the team participates. Actually the opposite is true – the project is under more control because teams make better decisions and are more committed to carrying them out.

Principle number 2: People are inspired by what is meaningful to them. To make a project meaningful to the team, you need to connect the project to the strategic goals of the organization. When people on a team understand the project – why it's being done, what they are supposed to do, how what they do affects others and fits into the whole picture, they are more effective as individuals and more effective as a team.

Principle number 3: Team members that understand how the parts of a project fit together are more committed to making the project successful. It's important for everyone to understand the interdependencies in the project and to see how their pieces are essential to getting the whole project completed successfully. Create the schedule on banner paper with sticky notes with the team. That way they'll understand how their pieces fit into the big picture.

Principle number 4: Team buy-in is increased if team members work from shared information. Use visual, team-based tools to guide the project management process so that everyone sees the same information presented. Record ideas and decisions on flipchart paper. Use sticky notes for recording ideas. Team-based tools provide a structured way for everyone on the team to contribute and to reach consensus on a decision or solution.

Principle number 5: Show your appreciation for the contributions of each individual on the team and for the team as a whole. People are more motivated to perform when they feel valued. When teams are valued, they also perform better. Not everyone on a team will feel valued in the same way. However, there are some standard ways in which to value people and teams.

Take time at each team meeting to recognize accomplishments and thank people for their contributions. Periodically solicit their feedback on how you can improve. In addition, when significant accomplishments are achieved, take time for a small celebration.

As important as recognition and celebration are, it's equally important for the team to feel you're on their side and if they take a risk, that you'll support them. If you want a motivated team, remove obstacles and provide a shield that minimizes outside interference.

Principle number 6: To build a team you must build and maintain an environment of mutual trust and respect.

Trust takes time to build. Tips for building trust include:

- Honor diversity of thinking, learning and other individual differences
- Don't make promises you can't keep
- Keep your commitments
- Maintain confidences
- Value each person's inputs and ideas
- Be honest
- Use good people skills
- Use good facilitation skills
- Eliminate blame

Although trust is built slowly, it can be destroyed in an instant, and when it has been destroyed, rebuilding trust takes a very long time.

Principle number 7: Empower the team. Try these tips for empowering the team:

- Have the team create the project plan
- Maintain team ownership during execution
- Create clear accountability and then don't
- Set up an oversight process so you have early warning signs if the project is off track
- Make sure people have the resources/cooperation they need to get the job done
- Make sure people have the skills to do the work assigned

Try applying these seven basic principles and see if they don't make you a more effective leader.



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