



BUILDING SUCCESS UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF A SKILLED PROJECT MANAGER

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Growing up around the construction industry, I remember watching firsthand as my father faced the challenges of successfully navigating all the elements necessary to construct a building. He spent his entire life in the construction industry, beginning as a bricklayer apprentice and ending his career working as a project manager and a construction field superintendent for a company that built medium-sized commercial office buildings in New Jersey.

No saying in the construction industry rings truer than the famous words of Benjamin Franklin, "Time is money." Construction professionals know the importance of delivering a project on time and on budget, all while meeting or exceeding quality standards.

I remember lengthy phone calls in the evenings and on weekends, listening in as my father coordinated the tasks of multiple subcontractors,

scheduled inspections based upon completion dates of the subs, and reported continually to upper management along with the owner of the company. When one component delayed work, I heard how quickly he changed course and made adjustments to keep the job on track because, after all, time is money.

Considered a stressful and fast-paced job, a project manager does more than simply manage a project. He essentially leads it. He is continually influencing people who provide skills and labor for a timely completion. I spoke with two successful executives in the field to determine what skills a successful project manager needs.

First, I spoke with family friend James G. Petrucci of J.G. Petrucci Company (jgpetrucci.com), a premier design/building developer in New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania. Next, I interviewed Don Magruder,

CEO of Ro-Mac Lumber & Supply (romaclumber.com), which is here in Leesburg. Below are their thoughts and insights on what makes a successful construction project manager.

Jim Petrucci shares three critical leadership qualities he looks for in a successful project manager (PM):

- "Leadership is absolutely critical to the PM's performance and, in turn, critical to the success of a project. A PM exercises leadership over the subcontractors, all of whom have other projects they are responsible for. The PM needs to know when and how to push to maintain schedule and quality.
- "A PM's leadership is also critical in client relations. A PM that is in firm control of the project will inspire confidence in the client. A client who loses confidence is unhappy, regardless of how well things might be going.

- “A PM needs to lead and follow his field superintendent. An out-of-touch PM dictates to the field; a PM with leadership respects what is going on in the field and leads accordingly.”

Don Magruder cites the three necessary traits and skill sets for the successful project manager:

- “A great project manager knows the business. Some of the very best come up through the ranks, and they have a level of competence to discern what works and what doesn’t.
- “Next, a great project manager has an unstoppable work ethic. Project managers work on deadlines, demand accuracy, and have no time for those who are late, miss deadlines, or create drama. It is all about getting the job done.
- “Finally, a great project manager allows the strength of his character to lead. This is the type of person you know is in charge when entering a room by the demeanor and

the respect garnered.”
Magruder states, “A mistake a lot of construction companies make with project managers is they put people in these positions that do not have the three qualities needed to be successful, and they fail. It’s more about leadership than education.”

Additional leadership qualities that make for a successful PM are:

BEING A GOOD COMMUNICATOR

A successful project manager is able to communicate with people at all levels. Project leadership calls for clear communication about responsibilities, goals, expectations, performance, and feedback. Leadership skills come through in the project manager’s ability to successfully negotiate and persuade others to ensure the success of the team and the project as a whole.

SHARING A VISION FOR THE PROJECT

The project manager must be able to articulate the vision needed for successfully navigating the project to completion. They need to inspire

others to share this vision in order to gain trust and confidence to see the project completed.

PROBLEM SOLVING

The best project managers are excellent problem solvers. While they incorporate feedback from the team, the project manager is expected to lead the way and provide a good solution if the team cannot.

TASK DELEGATION

It is necessary for project managers to delegate tasks. There are too many details within a construction project to micromanage everyone. Trusting the team and those hired to work on a project is an essential component in effective leadership.

ENTHUSIASM AND EMPATHY

Let’s face it, we all want leaders who are excited, driven, and possess a “can-do” attitude. These people inspire the team to work harder, smarter, and with a desire for greater results. Successful leaders also show empathy to their team by treating them as individuals and respecting private lives outside of work.

COMPETENCE

A successful project manager has a proven track record that enables others to see a leader. It’s a balancing act between a hands-on and hands-off approach.

Leadership is about navigating unsteady waters. Construction projects rarely go as planned, within the time frame, budget constraints, or expectations of quality, and the project manager must remain cool under pressure. The team must know that although a project doesn’t always go as planned, there’s another way to make it work. We’ve all heard that successful leaders see problems as opportunities, and this leadership style allows the project to get back on track with success being the only option.

Project management is as much about leadership as it is effective management of the many parts of this department. Leadership for construction project managers is always relationship-oriented.

