Interpersonal Skills and You
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Please hold for a scene from the movie *The Office*:

> **Bob:** *"What would you say ya do here?"*
> **Tom***: "Well look, I already told you! I deal with the %&$@$ customers so the engineers don't have to! I have people skills! I am good at dealing with people! Can't you understand that? What the %&#$ is wrong with you people?"*

And we're back. For those of you who have scene *The Office*, you most likely know this scene. For those of you who haven't, watch this short clip - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCC_PxRWVl4 - as it is imperative for the intellectual debate we are about to delve into.

Interpersonal skills often get a bad wrap as being "common sense" or "fluffy", with people giving more of their time and attention to develop their technical skills. But the truth is, the more we lose focus on the importance of interpersonal skills, the more at risk we are to have a poor emotionally intelligence, which can hurt our relationships and our careers. Interpersonal skills are becoming such a hot topic, that this specific subject even has its very own appendix in the PMBOK Guide – Fifth Edition (which will be tested starting July 31, 2013).

So why are interpersonal skills so important to project managers? Let's take a look at 11 aspects of interpersonal skills stressed in the PMBOK Guide – Fifth Edition, to get a better understanding of how interpersonal skills shape your projects and shape your career.

1. Leadership – When you are able to lead from a place of trust and respect (rather than from using punishments to illicit fear) your project team will be able to accomplish so much more. When you are a good leader, you have the ability to get things done through others, and use each individual's strength to the advantage of the entire team. To be a successful leader, you can't just create a submissive team – you need to create an inspired team that shares your vision and understands how their contributions are helping to achieve that vision.

2. Team Building – You can't put together a group of people that seem to make a good team "on paper" and expect reality to align with your expectations. And, unless you are really lucky, a team will need to proactively work on team building in order to be effective. The team can do this by openly and honestly talking about their expectations in their unique team roles, deciding how they will deal with conflict should it arise, and focusing on problems in terms of possible solutions – not in terms of blaming people for the problems.

3. Motivation – How do you get a committed team who will work hard toward a project's goal? First, you need to find out how to motivate them. This task may be more difficult than you originally think, because not everyone is motivated in the same way. One person may be money motivated, while another is better by professional achievement and growth. Get to know your team and what motivates them, and develop a strategy to improve incentives that speak to those motivations.

4. Communication - As you most likely already know, communication, or lack thereof, can make or break a project team. While a communication plan can greatly help in ensuring effective communication, there are many other interpersonal dynamics that impact effective project team communication, such as cultural and communication style differences.

5. Influencing – The skill of influence is very powerful, and can be used either destructively or productively. You, as a project manager with good intentions, have it in your greatest interest to improve your influence skills to a level where you have the power to make significant changes and improvements in your project team and organization.

6. Decision Making – How will you and your team make important project team decisions? Will you as the Project Manager make decisions on your own, or will you involve your team for most decisions? Its important to take some time to think about the decision making process that will take place in your project team, as it will effect many other areas, such as motivation and team building.

7. Political and Cultural Awareness – The days are gone where a Project Manager can live in an isolated bubble of their particular circumstance and experience and expect to be able to relate to others. In today's global environment, successful project managers do not only recognize and accommodate cultural diversity – they capitalize on it.

8. Negotiation – Think about how many times you negotiate every day. Whether it pertains to what you watch on TV that evening (if I get to choose the restaurant, you can decide what we watch afterward) to what currency in which your newest international deal will be conducted – negotiations permeate every part of our life. The more you listen to the other party and understand their needs wants, as well as your own, the better you will be able to find a mutually beneficial solution that is win-win for both parties.

9. Trust Building – Can you imagine working on a project team where each person only has their own interests in mind, and neither trusts or likes anyone else on the team? Neither can I. Trust is the foundation of a good project team, and give the entire team the flexibility they need to accomplish tasks in the way they best know how.

10. Conflict Management – When we hear the word "conflict", we often think of fighting, relationship deterioration, and stress. But this negative connotation does not have to be your project team's reality. Turning conflict into collaborate problem solving is one of the best experiences a team can have, as it addresses the validity of dissenting opinions and aims to make the situation better than it was before.

11. Coaching – A project team reaches the ultimate level of productivity when each team member feels empowered to reach their full potential. When you invest in your team in the form of training and formal or information coaching, they will in turn invest in the project and organization with their time, skill, and expertise.

So the next time someone asks you - "*What would you say ya do here?*"- You can say with confidence that you are a Project Manager that utilizes your interpersonal skills ("people skills") to create effective and successful project teams that can move mountains.

About the Author:

Michelle LaBrosse, PMP, is an entrepreneurial powerhouse with a penchant for making success easy, fun, and fast. She is the founder of **Cheetah Learning**, the **author** of the **Cheetah Success Series**, and a prolific **blogger** whose mission is to bring Project Management to the masses.

Cheetah Learning is a virtual company with 100 employees, contractors, and licensees worldwide. To date, more than 50,000 people have become "Cheetahs" using Cheetah Learning's innovative Project Management and accelerated learning techniques.

Recently honored by the Project Management Institute (PMI®), Cheetah Learning was named Professional Development Provider of the Year at the 2008 PMI® Global Congress. A dynamic keynote speaker and industry thought leader, Michelle was previously recognized by PMI as one of the 25 Most Influential Women in Project Management in the world.

Michelle's articles have appeared in more than 100 publications and websites around the world. Her monthly column, the **Know How Network**, is carried by over 400 publications.

She is a graduate of the Harvard Business School's Owner/President Management (OPM) program and also holds engineering degrees from Syracuse University and the University of Dayton.