

## **Are you Low Maintenance or High Maintenance?**

*By Michelle LaBrosse, PMP<sup>®</sup>, Chief Cheetah and Founder of Cheetah Learning*

I was recently watching the movie *When Harry Met Sally*, and there's that funny scene where Harry tells Sally that she's high maintenance:

*Harry Burns: There are two kinds of women: high maintenance and low maintenance.*

*Sally Albright: Which one am I?*

*Harry Burns: You're the worst kind; you're high maintenance, but you think you're low maintenance.*

*Sally Albright: I don't see that.*

*Harry Burns: You don't see that? Waiter, I'll begin with a house salad, but I don't want the regular dressing. I'll have the balsamic vinegar and oil, but on the side. And then the salmon with the mustard sauce, but I want the mustard sauce on the side. "On the side" is a very big thing for you.*

*Sally Albright: Well, I just want it the way I want it.*

*Harry Burns: I know: high maintenance.*

In pop culture and our colloquial language, we use the terms "high maintenance" and "low maintenance" a lot.

And like Harry, we're usually not talking about our cars. Instead, we're talking about people -- those we work with, live with and have to deal with as part of the grand adventure of life.

So, this got me thinking about the impact of high-maintenance versus low-maintenance people. When I thought about the high-maintenance types I've worked with on teams, two things immediately came to mind. 1) They suck up lots of time, and 2) They lower the output of the entire team.

This column is written as a wake-up call for the high-maintenance people out there who really don't realize the impact they are having. Is it you? Here's a quick way to find out.

### **You Know You're High Maintenance When...**

1. People plan around you, because they don't want to deal with the detours you require.
2. You are rarely a travel buddy for business or pleasure.
3. Your friends and co-workers see you as someone who is always taking and never giving.
4. You are quick to criticize without offering another approach or idea.
5. You talk and rarely listen.

6. You bring problems to the table with no solutions.
7. You have a hard time adapting to change.
8. You are inflexible, and compromise is not in your vocabulary.
9. You state your own preferences first, and expect others to conform to what you want.
10. You don't notice the "eye-rolls" that you illicit, because you are too busy looking in the nearest mirror.

If that's you -- or maybe just someone you know -- let's look at key phrases and questions that can turn high-maintenance behavior into low maintenance.

*"What do you think about that...?"*

*"I like where you are going with that...what if we...?"*

*"I'm open to ideas. How would you like to proceed?"*

*"I chose the meeting location last time. Who'd like to chose it this time?"*

*"You really know the Chicago market, what's your take?"*

*"You know the best restaurants in New York...I'll defer to you."*

*"Jim had a great solution he told me about. Jim?"*

*"How can I help?"*

*"How can we make this work for everyone?"*

*"How can we do it better next time?"*

The greatest gift you can give to the people around you is to turn the frame of reference so it is not about you, but it is about them. See the greater whole as more important than your individual role. When you shift your perspective from you and your needs to the needs of others, you start to see and hear things differently. You can only truly listen when you are not in your own head thinking about what you want to say next.

It is a proven fact that people feel understood when they actually do most of the talking and are being listened to. So, you want to be the low-maintenance person who is doing the listening and who is engaging others in solutions.

A great project manager is one who can see the opportunities for improvements as well as the strengths. Ask yourself: What can I do to better understand others? How can I be more collaborative? How has my behavior lowered the output or productivity on my team? What are the changes I can make?

Be brave enough to ask other people what changes you can make, and be ready to listen and show others that you can move from high maintenance to low maintenance.

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The Know How Network is a monthly column written by Michelle LaBrosse, the founder and Chief Cheetah of Cheetah Learning. Distributed to hundreds of newsletters and media outlets around the world, the Know How Network brings the promise, purpose and passion of Project Management to people everywhere. Visit [www.cheetahlearning.com](http://www.cheetahlearning.com) to learn more about Cheetah PM, the fastest way to learn about Project Management and get your PMP. You can also get your career in gear with [CheetahWare](#), free Project Management tools.

### **About the Author**



Michelle LaBrosse, PMP<sup>®</sup>, 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's expertise in project management is highly regarded in the industry. 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.

Cheetah Learning is a virtual company with 100 employees, contractors, and licensees worldwide. To date, more than 30,000 people have become "Cheetahs" using Cheetah Learning's innovative Project Management and accelerated learning techniques.

Michelle's articles have appeared in over 100 publications and web sites around the world. Her monthly column, the [Know How Network](#) is carried by over 400 publications, and her monthly newsletter goes out to more than 50,000 people. Her radio program, [Your World Your Way](#), is a weekly broadcast that is an inspiring and practical look at how Project Management fuels success.

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

She lives in Nevada with her family and likes to rejuvenate in Alaska where you'll often find her kayaking, hiking, and riding her motorcycle.

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