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FEATURES

Tips for Consultants to Gain Respect

Project management consultants must win respect from their team members, even on high-stress, short-term assignments.

by Jeffrey Steele



Project management consultants rarely have time to develop the same rapport with their teams that organization-based project managers have. But they still need to win the respect and confidence of team members from project to project and from organization to organization.

With the right skills and traits, building this bond is possible. Here, three veteran consultants and Project Management Professional (PMP®) credential holders highlight 11 strategies to help consultants overcome such challenges.

The PMP credential holders who will discuss this issue include:

- Pablo Lledo, PMP, CEO of MasConsulting in Mendoza, Argentina
- Julie Stone, PMP, senior consultant with Genesis 10, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA
- Saadi Adra, PMP, PMI certified OPM3 assessor and consultant, manager of professional services with CMCS FZ-LLC in Dubai, United Arab Emirates

1. Know Your Role. When consultants join a team, they should be aware that there is no established history, legitimate power or active channels between themselves and new team members. As an outsider, consultants should not act like directors but rather like supporters of the team. "This means [the consultant] will coach, mentor, train, support, persuade, align and guide team members through leadership skills," Mr. Adra says.

2. Get Back to the Basics. It is always important to conduct team-building exercises and create an open, responsive, respectful environment in which a team can work. "The basics of good project management do not change," Ms. Stone says.

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3. **Make All Team Members Feel Comfortable.** Highlight the fact that a consultant arrives for a relatively short period of time with a specific objective and poses no threat to existing management and team members. This enables honest, unbiased communication leading to successful relationships and trust, says Mr. Adra.

4. **Show Empathy.** Though the consultant may receive formal power written in the project charter, team members will not buy into consultants' input unless those consultants perceive and respond to team members' feelings, Mr. Lledo says.

5. **Talk to the Right People.** "I always listen for the unexpected," Ms. Stone says. "I may be talking to the wrong person for [what I need]. The client's organizational chart may be configured in a way I don't expect, and I really need to talk to someone who has the responsibility for the [issue] I am dealing with, but may not have the expected title."

6. **Keep Your Sense of Humor.** Project complexity and technical challenges should not prevent consultants from seeing the lighter side of the situation when the opportunity arises. Doing so can build rapport, Mr. Lledo says.

7. **Share Knowledge from Outside Projects.** The consultant's position, which is external to the organization, can be an asset. "Often, my internal full-time employee counterparts see me as a great source of outside knowledge, industry best practices, lessons learned from other similar efforts and cutting edge information from relevant vendors," Ms. Stone says.

8. **Invigorate the Team.** It is not necessary to come into a project and immediately adopt all of the team's viewpoints. Instead, feel comfortable sharing your outsider's perspective. "The normal resistance to change is minimized, especially when the new approach projects improved forecasts," Mr. Adra says.

9. **Do Your Homework.** A theoretical and practical understanding of the project as well as in-depth knowledge of the organization is vital. This is usually acquired through research and interviews. "However, it's harder to show your team members your knowledge if you lack empathy and humor," Mr. Lledo says.

10. **Be a Good Communicator.** There is no quality more crucial to relationship building than effective communication skills. "The [consultant] will use common language understood by every stakeholder and in this way he or she will assure good feedback between the parties involved," Mr. Lledo says.

11. **Be a Leader.** Project management and consulting are relationship driven. "Both consultants and project managers have to inspire, lead and convince others over whom they have no direct control to carry out tasks that will fulfill deliverables, projects and efforts supporting the client's bottom line," Ms. Stone says.

Jeffrey Steele is a Chicago, Illinois, USA-based freelance writer who has contributed to the e-publication *Your Business Advisor*.

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