

11 Communication Skills of Effective Project Leaders

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Project managers abound, but highly effective project leaders are much harder to find. The latter are shaped not only by their technical knowledge and capabilities, but by how effectively they communicate with others at all levels.



Great project leaders are objective, trustworthy, focused and confident. They lead by example, foster an energetic environment and are expert in managing the expectations of key stakeholders. Here's a deeper look at these characteristics and more — plus the role communication plays in project leaders' success.

Trustworthiness: Most people want to work and do business with leaders they trust. Trust is one of the most important qualities we look for in a leader. If people are unsure whether they can trust someone, they are less likely to want to embrace the leader's vision and direction.

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Transparency: This goes hand-in-hand with trust. Strong leaders choose to be transparent in their communications. They want their team to trust not only what they say, but what they mean. There are no hidden agendas or reading between the lines. Transparency tells people a lot about your intentions. And unless the information is intended to be confidential, transparency is more likely to help than hurt.

Focus and stability: In order to effectively lead, it's imperative to focus on key aspects of a project and remain calm under pressure. Not all projects go as planned. In fact, most do not. But it's during these times that project teams look to their leaders to be rational and practice sound judgment. Teams rely on you for the stability and levelheaded thinking that shows clear focus and agility.

Objectivity and fairness: Complex projects pose more risks to team dynamics, for example when individual stakeholders or department objectives clash. Strong leaders are inclusive in their communications and seek to constructively overcome these differences. Effective project leaders actively listen to more than one side without bias and work with key stakeholders to prioritize ideas and find the right solutions that best support the overall strategic goals.



Confidence: Stakeholders and executives want project leaders that are confident in their knowledge and abilities, but are not arrogant. There is a big difference between the two: Arrogance tends to make team members uncomfortable and reluctant, especially when sharing ideas and voicing differing opinions. Confidence, on the other hand, allows teams to work toward shared goals.

Leading by example: True leaders make every effort to live by the same rules they expect of others and affirm to the team that they, too, walk the talk. Strong project leaders foster participation by allowing team members to utilize their strengths, they give credit where it is due and remain professional and respectful of others at all times.

Energy and motivation: Let's face it: No one wants a leader that is pessimistic, negative or disengaged. With hectic schedules and projects that don't always go as planned, a project leader's disposition and motivational abilities can mean the difference between teams that work cohesively or in complete dysfunction. Highly effective project leaders boost team morale and motivate. This can influence buy-in at all levels and keep support throughout the project.

According to [Matt Barney](#), founder and CEO of [LeaderAmp](#), persuasion is an important quality: "Leaders must systematically influence others to execute the project to achieve shared goals," he says.

Consistency and flexibility: Flip-flopping is not a good strategy when it comes to leadership. Great project leaders are reliable and consistent with their communication quality, style, and frequency — yet still adapt based on audience needs. Great project leaders establish themselves as reliable communicators to develop credibility with project sponsors and flex and adapt during change.

Accessibility: It is impossible for a project leader to be effective if he or she is inaccessible. Team members and stakeholders need to know they can easily access their project leader and communicate freely and without barriers. Highly effective project leaders are never closed-off.

Clarity: Great project leaders gear their communication methods, mediums and styles toward their audience. They also have the ability to take something complex and make it simple in order to reach audiences at different levels.

Mark Grimm of [Mark Grimm Communications](#) and former TV News Anchor who has interviewed Presidents Bush and Clinton understands the importance of leadership and simplicity and says, "Simplicity is not simple. A leader's top communication quality is the ability to paint a clear and vibrant picture of the company or group's true purpose."

Respect: Culture, age, gender, experience, education and communication preferences can all impact communication methods. Highly effective project leaders communicate in a clear and concise manner while still demonstrating respect and value for the contributions and opinions of others. They understand this is key in maintaining positive working relationships.

This may seem like a lofty list, but these qualities make the difference between simply managing projects and leading successful ones.

