

40. Pelletier, DiTullio & Kaibni: Influencers Part V – Teamwork

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0:00:03 Paul Pelletier: Over 70% of workers in all sectors, all industries are impacted by workplace bullying.

0:00:10 Lisa DiTullio: Sure there's work that needs to be done and it has to be done against looming deadlines, and tight budgets, but the reality is, is that the relationships across us as human beings is first and foremost.

0:00:21 Rami Kaibni: You need to be smart enough to know how to communicate with people, take the best out of them and at the same time reward them for what they do.

0:00:29 Kendall Lott: We all know Project Management is a team sport. The success of a project is directly related to the caliber of the team that implements it: the ability of each individual player and, perhaps most importantly, their ability to work together. So what constitutes an effective team? And how can you ensure that your team will work at optimum capacity to deliver quality product?

0:00:48 KL: Three experts on teamwork, and how it relates to project management, discuss how to nurture and manage your team for quality results.

0:00:55 Speaker 5: From the Washington DC chapter of the Project Management Institute, this is PM Point of View. The podcast that looks at project management from all the angles. Here's your host Kendall Lott.

0:01:07 KL: In this episode, we examine that crucial area where human resource management and project management intersect. Once again I've called upon a group of influencers from projectmanagement.com to help navigate this tricky terrain. My first guest, Paul Pelletier, has published an impressive number of papers and webinars on the projectmanagement.com portal. This is actually his second time on PM Point of View. In Episode 33, I picked his brain about project management and security. Check it out. As principal of Paul Pelletier Consulting, Paul specializes in real solutions for workplace bullying, respect, and diversity. He maintains that the project management field is particularly prone to bullying. I was curious about that so I Skyped him at his home in British Columbia.

0:01:49 PP: Bullying can be as harmful to our projects' productivity, workplace harmony, and profits, as it is for our children in schools. And unfortunately, the rates of workplace bullying are off the charts. In a recent study of 1000 employees in a variety of United States workplaces done by the Workplace Bullying Institute, yes there is such a thing, [chuckle] they found that over 70% of workers have been impacted by workplace bullying. So why is project management impacted? Well, we tend to focus on things that bullies are really good at, and that is results. Bullies are

extraordinarily capable of getting results; unfortunately, they do it on the backs and through, unfortunately, bad behavior impacting all of the people around them.

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0:02:53 PP: Bullying includes behaviors that can be categorized into sort of three buckets. The first is aggressive communication and that can be everything from eye rolling to actually humiliating someone in public, to being demanding in a very inappropriate way. The second bucket is manipulation of work. And that is things like taking credit for work that is not done by the person, that could be changing the tasks, that could be last minute, "Oops you were to present on X but guess what? You're presenting on Y." and really manipulating people. The third bucket is what we call "Sabotage" And that can be leaving people out of an important loop of communication, that can be micro-managing to an absolute excess, that can be denying someone the opportunities for training or promotion that others are being provided.

0:03:56 PP: And so the three buckets ultimately end up with what is bullying? It is repetitive, it's not a one-off, it's not a person coming into work having a really bad day, who explodes and afterwards really knows that they behaved badly and they sincerely apologize. It is not that. The second thing is that it is deliberate. Bullies actually know what they're doing and so they're not acting innocently, they are specifically targeting an individual for the kinds of humiliation that they're known for. It is disrespectful. And the last thing is that it has to be for the benefit of the bully so that whatever they're doing, you can see the pattern that their activities are aligning with either making the bully look really good, giving the bully the spotlight, giving the bully a chance to rise above everyone else around her, those kinds of things. So how does that affect project management?

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0:05:00 KL: Project managers are all about communication, they're actually about work assignments and they are in fact supposed to progressively plan and manage, right? They are to deliberate and be deliberate. The only thing in project management [chuckle] that we don't talk about doing that's consistent is being disrespectful. Nothing in the PMBOK says you should do something that looks disrespectful.

0:05:19 PP: So layer on to Project Management the reality of our work, which is we're constantly under pressure and stress to get our projects don ...how? On budget, on time, on scope. We have challenging clients that keep saying, "Hey, can you do this earlier? Can you do it faster? Can you do it with less money?" We also often don't have authority over our resources, so we're competing with other people and we often are subject to someone and their organization canceling a project, or modifying it, or changing scope mid-stream. All of that leads us to the behavior that we want to control things. We want to control people when we may not be able to. We want to control our own destiny. And we're usually only viewed as good as the success of our last project. So you can imagine in this hyper-competitive, pressure-oriented environment, how bullies can thrive. And the best example I can give is someone confided in me at a Project Management Institute Congress that they overheard a vice president talking about another colleague. And the actual words used were, "You know Jane, she's amazing, she can whip any unit into shape." And so you can see why bullies are sometimes favored by senior management. Because they can get results within the context of those really challenging situations.

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0:06:54 PP: And let's just wrap one last thing into it, ethics. So you said there is nothing in the PMBOK about not being disrespectful. There actually is in the sense that we have a Code of Ethics and a Professional Code of Conduct that every year we sign on to. And one of the pillars is respect and honesty. And so if we are actually treating others badly or as a project manager we witness another project manager violating our standards or code, we actually have an ethical and a professional obligation to do something.

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0:07:37 PP: You can be performance managing someone and doing it in accordance with your workplace and organizational policies, and even if the person being managed doesn't like what they hear, that's okay. But you can also do it in a way that is bullying. Simple example: If I am performance managing you, I can choose to say things like, "Kendall, hey did you... I think we need to work on a couple of things where I've noticed that you struggle. So I think it might be helpful to get you some training, maybe we'll get you a mentor." That kind of thing. Or you can choose a bullying approach which is, "Kendall, what the hell? I thought I hired someone really good. I could give this to a four-year-old." I've actually heard all of those things in stories of project managers who've encountered bullying. So with the... Every example I give is real.

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0:08:35 KL: What is the role of senior management? What is their responsibility in this? Because this sits in a bed of something, project managers are not the top of the hierarchy.

0:08:42 PP: I believe that employers and managers as employers have both a moral and ethical responsibility to take action. Because if they remain neutral, the bullying continues and it's not going to stop unless senior managers make it stop. And they do have the authority, the power and the decision-making strategy to be able to do that. My opinion is that everyone in an organization can play an anti-bullying advocate role and encourage change. But what are some of the things that a manager can actually do? Well, first of all they can walk the walk and they can make sure that if they see behavior that isn't acceptable while on their watch, they immediately take action. And that may require that they get informed. They may need to understand bullying as opposed to just someone who's really aggressive or hyper-competitive. They definitely have to ensure and lobby for workplace respect policies that incorporate bullying behavior and actually call it that. And so if you have a workplace respect policy that includes bullying, then when someone acts as a bully there is an instant point of reference that you can use to deal with that behavior.

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0:10:08 KL: And that's something you have some examples for? I mean as a leader of a project management group, as a leader of a company, I would be intrigued by that.

0:10:16 PP: Okay. So, I've written a book that is a business handbook called Workplace Bullying: It's Just Bad For Business. And what the book contains is prevention, management, and elimination strategies for organizations and everyone else. So whether you're an executive, a manager, an HR professional, a project manager, a target, a coworker, it provides you with action plans and tools that

can be used within the context of your authority or your sphere of influence. And so that's a really good example. There also is the Workplace Bullying Institute which if you look online is a terrific resource for all kinds of information about everything that I'm talking about.

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0:11:05 KL: What else should senior managers be looking at here?

0:11:08 PP: Teach respect and absolutely create what I call 'rules for engagement' with your team and your group. What does that look like? Well, in project management it can be as simple as having in your project charters behavioral expectations. So that you ensure, "Listen, when we're working as a team, we don't interrupt each other. We let everyone express themselves fully and completely before we engage. It is absolutely great to have differences of opinion but we express them in respectful ways." Those are just examples. The other critical piece, is that we performance manage people immediately when they behave badly. And we really should include collegiality and teamwork in every performance review because it has such a huge impact on the success of the team, the projects, the programs.

0:12:08 KL: I've seen this idea of behaviors built in, not so much the charter, but at the team kick-off. When they're finally assembling, they're preparing to start getting people to build out on the work breakdown structure and all that. So you're pulling your team together for the first time, is what's kind of a team commitment or how we behave, how we act is... Was actually and frankly part of the communications plan.

[chuckle]

0:12:29 PP: We do set the standards as managers and project managers and we should be responsible to ensure that we create the environment we need.

0:12:38 KL: I saw a saying the other day that, something to the effect of, from a manager's perspective. "You get the behavior that you allow."

0:12:46 PP: Absolutely. I use that quote all the time.

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0:12:55 KL: When you were identifying why project managers might be prone to this due to the external pressures put on them, frankly how we're trained in terms of some of our toolkit and the demands that they are creating for themselves and are having put on them, you mentioned they have a lack of authority sometimes. That strikes me as something that's much deeper than project management when we think about, even playground bullies. There's something about this... Maybe it's just pop psychology, but because I don't have power in another scenario, I will try and execute it here or institute it, or implement it here. Is that what we're seeing? What do you see is the role of lack of authority here?

0:13:32 PP: If we are a project manager, we rarely actually have performance management authority over the resources that have been allocated to our project. So often we get the resources that are handed to us from different sections and different units and it's not uncommon for there to

be people coming in and out. If we don't have the capacity to performance-manage those people, it makes it very hard to deal with their behavior when it gets inappropriate. We then have to go to that person's supervisor and say, "Are you aware that John is behaving totally out of control?" And we have to then hope that John's boss does something about it. So that's Problem One. Problem Two is, if we are a bully, it is wonderful to actually have that type of work culture because then it is very hard for the people that we're bullying to do much about it because they don't have any connection to the bully's boss. And so when you're brought in from another unit and let's say you are working with someone who's a bully, what is your line of recourse?

0:14:50 PP: And the last part I really want to make clear is, unlike schoolyard bullying, in the workplace, the targets are actually not the people that are weak, or perceived to be weak, or perceived to be different, or perceived to be... Don't have the sort of network of support. In the workplace, it's actually the most common to see the target being the go-to veteran worker, the most technically skilled person in the team, the person who's really popular and loved, and usually the person is very nurturing and very team-oriented. Why is that?

0:15:32 PP: Well, the bully wants to be perceived to be at the top of their game. They want to be the one to get credit for all the results. They want to get the results that everyone notices. So it then makes sense that they are threatened by someone who's super good, someone who's super expert or a SME, a Subject Matter Expert, so they actually try to take out the people that, in logical terms, would be the people that would help them get those results. But they find those people threatening.

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0:16:08 KL: This means as a project manager or as a program, or portfolio manager, if I were to see some pretty good powerhouse people leaving and not leaving for better jobs, but just leaving teams, that might be a real call to say, "Why would a senior expert, why would a natural leader on this team be needing to leave?" I think you've just potentially raised a real flag of someone who might have oversight or governance into project teams.

0:16:35 PP: This is where the HR side of things and the leadership side of things comes into play. People don't leave a project for no reason and they don't leave a company for no reason. So if you, as a portfolio program or PMO manager, notice that team X is bleeding talent, or no one wants to work with Jane and you're aware of this, there's something going on there. It's really important, if you want to meet your targets, if you want to get the results, if you want to be successful, and if you want to keep your clients happy, it behooves you to actually start investigating and to finding out what's going on here.

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0:17:25 KL: In matrixed organizations, which is what we see a lot of in the project management world, the project manager who sees a potential bully... In fact sees any bad behavior, difficult behavior, if it's bullying as well, really may not have access to that performance review, chain of command, etcetera. Flip side, if you're the project manager who's the bully, your team members have no access to your chain of command, easily. They get to vote with their feet, as we discussed.

0:17:50 PP: You got it.

0:17:51 KL: So, to the extent we have matrix projects, we have a higher risk of team failure. There is a problem with authority. So it's not just getting people to do work which is often referenced in the PMBOK through a matrix perspective. How do you get people to do work when you don't "own them", when you're not in charge of them. But now it's, "How do we do corrective behavior in an environment like that?" Well there may be some techniques but I think from what I heard from you, I would take it as almost, I don't know if it's a law but it's certainly an upward pressure on risk. There is a higher risk of disproportionately dysfunctional team behavior in a matrixed environment.

0:18:31 PP: It's a huge risk so I'm going to just quote you a few things that might really help our listeners dig in here. Over 70% of workers in all sectors, all industries, are impacted by workplace bullying. So what happens when there's a bully? Well, if you are a team member, here is the statistics that should scare the heck out of you. Almost 50% intentionally decrease their work effort, 80% lose time worrying or focusing or gossiping about the problem, 66% say their performance declines, a whopping 78% say their commitment to the team, the organization and the project decline and a frightening 25% take it out on their customers.

0:19:19 KL: Oh boy.

0:19:20 PP: Clearly it's a major effect on project success because all of our constraints, whether it's performance, budget, timeline are going to be impacted by people who aren't performing.

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0:19:35 PP: This can ruin or negatively affect the reputation of the unit, the manager, the program director. The whole project management group can be impacted because word gets out that we're an unpleasant work environment to be part of. That can affect the risk related to all of our projects and the success of our projects, can make our stakeholders unhappy, can even ruin our customer relationships. And one really ugly example, in August of last year you might have remembered a very controversial article written by the New York Times about the alleged Darwinian and very workplace bullying work environment of Amazon. Within the five days of the article being published, their share value went down \$19 billion for no other reason. So I think it's important for executives actually start to analyze the broader impacts of a workplace bullying culture. If organizations allow this to fester, it poisons everything, and before you know it, you've got all of these risks coming on.

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0:20:53 PP: 29 states in America have entered the Healthy Workplace Bill into their legislatures. That is a national anti-workplace bullying bill and this bill gives a person who's a target or a victim of a workplace bully the right to sue, not only the bully but the organization who failed to protect them or deal with the problem. The risk is real. This legislation is coming and I think organizations really should be taking preventative steps now so that they're not in that target zone when the legislation is passed in their state.

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0:21:36 KL: Okay. Put anti-bullying policies in place so you have a point of reference to deal with that behavior if and when it occurs. Include behavioral expectations in your project charter. Paul's

book, [Workplace Bullying: It's Just Bad For Business](#) is available at Amazon, Barnes & Noble and at www.paulpelletierconsulting.com.

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0:22:07 KL: Based in Norwell, Massachusetts, Lisa DiTullio is the founder of Your Project Office, a boutique project management consulting firm primarily focused on the healthcare industry. She is a renowned thought leader and recognized international speaker on Project Management, and a staunch advocate of something she calls *collaborative leadership*. Tell me a little bit about what you mean by collaborative leadership.

0:22:29 LD: For every project that exists in any organization, it is a rarity or a virtual impossibility that any of those projects can successfully be delivered through a party of one. So regardless of how astute an organization is with putting in standard practices and predictability and all the other good stuff that we learn through the PMBOK and others, the reality is that unless we have capabilities of establishing and nourishing relationships, whether it be on the team, whether it be on the stakeholders, etcetera, so that everyone is working well together, then it doesn't matter how defined we put the practices in place, the team and nor will the project fully succeed as a result.

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0:23:23 KL: Well, you're talking there about the team less the leadership aspect itself I'm thinking, or is it the nature of leadership to get them to collaborate by nourishing these relationships?

0:23:31 LD: A good leader has to bring out the best in everyone on the team and unless there's someone that's actually there that's capably able of pulling out that collaborative aspect by being a strong leader, it can't happen and in fact, there's a very interesting article that was in the Harvard Business Review a number of years back. It was actually focused on suggesting what the best-performing CEOs in the world, the common core competencies that they have, and they defined collaborative leadership as someone who holds him or herself accountable for finding the potential in people and processes. And the four skills that they suggest can be learned in order for us to heighten and improve our collaborative leadership capabilities is our ability to be a good connector, our capability of attracting diversity on our team, how we start at the top, and the last component associated with that is, you actually need to be a tough leader. Doesn't mean you need to be mean but what it means, suggests, is we need to hold people accountable.

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0:24:43 KL: What does starting at the top mean?

0:24:44 LD: Starting at the top does not mean that you have to be the person at the highest level. But what it does is, starting at the top typically suggests that the farther we are in the hierarchy chain in most organizations, the farther away we are from good relationships that exist. And this is actually counterintuitive to what really needs to happen in order for us to be good collaborative leaders. We don't want to focus on our team members and look at them and label them as workers, we actually want to view them first as people.

0:25:17 KL: Right.

0:25:17 LD: And the only way that we're capably able to do that, by demonstrating to our own leadership capabilities, by exposing our own vulnerabilities. Because frankly everyone has failures, and not everyone has the answers to everything. And so the courage to be vulnerable, particularly in front of our team members even though we are "leading them", that actually instills extraordinarily unique situations across the dynamics of that team and people actually will view that leader with higher level of regard and respect. When you strip it all down it all goes back to the human relationship aspect of it, and part of that is us remembering that as leaders, sure there's work that needs to be done and it has to be done against looming deadlines and tight budgets. But the reality is, is that the relationships across us as human beings is first and foremost.

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0:26:18 KL: What is it that you need to train or the elements to train people in establishing and nourishing those relationships?

0:26:25 LD: Well the first thing I think is really key about when we start a project, even though we know that relationship factor is so incredibly important. Ten times out of eleven, we are assigned the project as project managers, "Here's the project, it's really important, could you deliver that project yesterday?" And as a result of that we oftentimes focus first and foremost, on the project needs. The thing that we need to develop, create, change, modify, whatever it is, that's really the goal of that project. Equally important however through that collaborative relationship is we need to acknowledge that we are bringing folks on that know a little bit more about the subject matter than we do, otherwise we wouldn't need them.

0:27:15 LD: And the reality is, is in today's world, when we bring these folks together, then we have a very diverse team. So if we just look at stereotypical definitions, a really great collaborative leader is going to bust the stereotypes, in recognizing that they have different values, very distinguishing characteristics, assets and liabilities. Acknowledge that up front, and actually engage in good conversation at the beginning of that particular project, so that people are talking with one another and they not only recognize that they are subject matter experts or individuals who have strong capabilities in their own right, that's why they've been invited to join a team; but the collaborative leaders also, as they're scoping and they're launching the project, are going to engage that group in some other kinds of conversation that starts to nourish the relationship.

0:28:09 KL: So this is about team building during the initial kick off and initial scoping, but you're getting specific to the idea of wrestling it from a diversity lens.

0:28:17 LD: That's exactly correct.

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0:28:24 KL: People aren't doing this? This is not a function of having a good kick off?

0:28:26 LD: They are not doing it enough. And they certainly don't do it regularly. So if we put it on a checklist and we say we're going start doing that at the time of kick off, and then we get into the meat of the project, oftentimes the whole idea and notion of us establishing a culture where it's great to give and receive feedback on a regular basis among team members as equals – because it

shouldn't always be the leader's responsibility to always give and receive feedback – and other opportunities, everyone on that team should be able to do that. A collaborative leader sets the stage and gives everyone permission that that's okay to do that. And there's some really interesting and easy techniques out there as to how that can happen.

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0:29:14 LD: I don't know if you had the opportunity to read one of my favorite authors, Marshal Goldsmith, and he has a great technique where he calls it 'feed forward'. And it's as simple as giving everyone on that team the ability to share feedback with one another, colleague to colleague. So basically it works like this, and we do it all the time and everyone loves this little exercise. You encourage that someone on the team identifies a behavior that they would like to change. They'd like to make some type of positive impact to that behavior. They select it. It's not me as a leader identifying it or observing it. I'm giving the team members total control in this domain. And that's key. Then what we do is we invite them to have a dialogue, one on one with another project team member, and we encourage that they pick a team member they don't know so well.

0:30:07 KL: Alright.

0:30:09 LD: Because we tend to be more open with our feedback when we have a less intimate relationship with them, particularly among colleagues.

0:30:16 KL: Right.

0:30:17 LD: So it's as simple as identifying what you want to improve in. So, Kendall, I'm going to come to you; I'm going to say, "I want to improve in..." and I just blurt it out. And I ask you for two suggestions for the future that you can suggest to me that will help me. What's crazy powerful about this exercise is it puts me in the control seat. I get to recognize what I want to improve in. That gives me power. Now, it also levels the playing field and it overcomes obstacles that we faced with "negative feedback". I don't want to hear negative feedback because it's going to deflate me. I want to hear something that's positive and something, perhaps, that you've done that I haven't even considered or I'd thought of. And I'm not looking in my past. So I'm not waiting for you to tell me everything that, perhaps, I didn't do right in the last six months. I'm taking ownership. It's like self-recognition that I want to improve in something, I'm asking you for some assistance, and the assistance that you're going to give me, perhaps, has nothing to do with the past because we're not close enough to know that. So, you're going to give me something forward thinking. Something that gives me the ability to be productive, optimistic and capable for me to put the target line out there to say, "I want to get better at this. This sounds great. I have an opportunity to do so."

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0:31:38 LD: We introduce this as an opportunity to promote a culture of giving and receiving feedback on a regular basis. Inevitably, every time we run this exercise, we have to stop the dialogue. We could let it go on for the remainder of the afternoon and they'll continue to engage. And here's the other thing that happens, it's a win/win when you introduce an exercise like that at a team level. Because you and I have engaged in that conversation and it was an enjoyable exchange between us, I've now created a connection between us that we had not had previously. And we all know it to be true, when we establish a stronger base of trust among our team members, the team

globally functions better.

0:32:23 KL: Oh yeah. Trust is a key here to this. So do you find that teams have been running where they... The key is that they don't have trust because they all get up and they all start focusing on the thing? The project?

0:32:33 LD: Absolutely.

0:32:34 KL: And so it's not that they're mean to each other or anything along those lines, it's specifically they just don't have trust to build a more positive way of sharing information?

0:32:42 LD: Yes and I think part of that also has to do with the unrealistic sense of timing associated with the need to get the project up as quickly as possible. And not having a lot of time. Once again, the idea and notion that the relationship piece of it is the fluffy stuff.

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0:33:03 KL: Let me look at it from a labeling perspective. One of the things that I've run across in different settings is on one side the ability to try and understand people and where they're coming from beyond some typical diversity questions. And to get to my question is, how do we avoid labels? We both need them and then don't want them.

0:33:23 LD: So I don't think that the notion of labeling is ever going to go away. Great leaders never treat everyone the same because no one is the same.

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0:33:38 KL: Great leaders don't treat everyone the same.

0:33:40 LD: Yeah.

0:33:41 KL: Wow. Red flags in the land of diversity, for example, right?

0:33:45 LD: Yeah. I mean, we're not talking about treating people unfairly, unjustly or, to your point, the political hot potato of what those words might mean. But it's the recognition that everyone on the team know differently because you individually identify who you need or what skills and competencies you need through your team members to join the team because someone knows something about a particular subject more than the others, etcetera. They might have more experience, etcetera. It's the recognition that that diversity that you have in your team means not everyone is on equal playing field. The great debate of the people who don't like bringing the rookie players on their team for all the obvious reasons, right? Because they... It's harder to bring them up to speed...

0:34:29 KL: Right.

0:34:30 LD: You need to guide them more. It's all of that stuff that we know to be true. Sure. But the reality is that they also come with different skill sets and different approaches of getting things done that are very different. And so it's about the ability to, first, you not necessarily stereotype

them. And if you recognize what capabilities they do have and why they're different. For example, there's generations that quite honestly come out of the womb with devices in hand. They have different approaches of solving old problems that perhaps other people have been looking at for a long time and haven't been able to see the solution. The challenge for the collaborative leader is recognizing that not everyone is the same and as a result, you need to recognize what they all bring, what their strengths are and how do you choreograph all of that in order to build the best orchestra.

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0:35:26 LD: It's really fascinating because if there were a large group audience sitting in front of me and I asked the room, "Think about your high performers on your teams and give me words to describe them." Many hands will go up very quickly and they'll start throwing out a whole bunch of words to describe. And then if I ask them to give me words to describe their "low performers" on their team, I'll get an equally, if not probably, a longer list of attributes to describe what they believe are their... Who are their low performers. What's really fascinating about it is the words they use to describe both their high and their low performers are always attitudinal descriptions, never intellectual. We don't have dummies on our teams, we have smart people.

0:36:13 LD: The challenge as leaders is to get it out of our heads that we need to cultivate the courage to be uncomfortable and teach these people how to accept discomfort as part of growth. The reality is, is that they love praise, everyone does, it draws us together through an exchange of appreciation. It can motivate people to greater achievement and it also tells people that they have performed well, or maybe even overextended from a performance perspective. But oftentimes when we think about leaders' need to give feedback on a regular basis, typically most of us connotate the word 'feedback' with "You're going to tell me what I don't do well." And it goes back to that whole premise, we have been trained in the business world, "Look at what's broken, figure out how to fix it." And instead if we spent more time looking at everything that worked well and how do you do more of it, not only can we potentially get there faster and better but everyone feels better throughout the experience.

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0:37:20 KL: So when they are able to describe what makes a good employee or a good team member even, versus one who's a poor team member, what they recognize or what they're identifying rather is, it's how that person behaves...

0:37:34 LD: Correct. It's about behavior.

0:37:35 KL: So you're saying, so let's just get to the point that we need to adjust their behavior?

0:37:39 LD: I'm not sure even the best of leaders can ultimately change anyone else's behavior.

0:37:43 KL: Yep.

0:37:44 LD: But what I do believe is that great leaders are brave enough to be able to identify and give feedback so that individuals are informed. And if we are able to provide that feedback on a regular basis and do it in a manner so that it's not threatening and it doesn't feel like we're blaming, nine out of ten times what happens is, there's more comfort and there's more safety across that team,

so people actually, they solidify closer and become more productive.

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0:38:21 LD: The tougher the message is that we have to deliver, the more we should deliver it with heart and what I frankly mean by that is it just simply needs to be authentic. So if I had a situation where I needed to provide feedback to someone, I might start the conversation with something like, "I'd like to share some feedback with you. It might be hard for you to hear, it also may be hard for me to deliver. We want everyone to be successful, so the intent of my feedback is to help you get better." And am I personally vested to provide a support mechanism to help them if they choose to change as a result or do something differently, can I support them through it?

0:39:05 KL: Yeah, what's the support going to be?

0:39:07 LD: That's exactly correct.

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0:39:13 KL: Have you had to work with people who don't fundamentally see that relationships count from the idea that that's just not how they process, not that they're mean people but...

0:39:22 LD: Interestingly enough, we find that more people from IT, and more men than women come to what would've historically been titled or labeled as the "soft skills" teachings. And when we ask, "Why are you here today and what do you want to get out of it?" The majority of those folks will admit in public, "I know how to manage the project. The process stuff and the tasks are easy to follow but I need to be better at the relationship piece."

0:39:56 KL: What is it that leaders need to know that we've seen that they've been missing, that they need to know to be effective in this?

0:40:02 LD: Primarily it's all human traits. They need to have courage, they need to behave with authenticity, and they need to have respect for one another.

[music]

0:40:13 KL: When I was a Peace Corps volunteer many, many years ago, one cultural precept that was emphasized repeatedly in our training was 'relationship before task.' Given that teams are made up of individuals with a range of skill sets and areas of expertise, not to mention generational differences and diverging personalities, it really is important that before you start barreling full steam into the task at hand, you kick off your project with a team building exercise. Encourage an atmosphere of constructive feedback. You can find scholarly papers and videos of Lisa's presentations on projectmanagement.com.

[music]

0:40:56 KL: Rami Kaibni is Projects and Development Manager at Field & Marten Associates, a British Columbia based firm of freelance PMs and real estate and land development consultants. From planning to budget to execution, they conduct feasibility studies, then manage the ensuing

construction. Rami has worked on high profile projects across Asia, including the Gulf region, Middle East and China. He is a top rated influencer on projectmanagement.com with high marks in the areas of talent and communications management.

0:41:25 KL: What are some of the key elements in communication with teams that you observe in a very practical way in the construction space?

0:41:33 RK: When you manage teams on site as a project manager, you are not 100% available on site and you cannot communicate with everybody equally. So first of all you have to identify who are your key team players and when you need to communicate with X person, and also you can't overdo this because this will make the people feel that you are micromanaging them which will drag them down. So, when you're in an office working on an IT project, let's say. And you have some virtual teams as well. Well basically, anytime you need to communicate with anybody you can just walk around and communicate with people on the spot but I used to work on projects where we used to be 30,000 people. I'm not talking about one or two thousand. I worked on oil and gas projects. They are huge projects. So, communication was one of our major management plans which we made sure we set properly before even the project started.

[music]

0:42:41 RK: So, one of the things that you need to make sure to do as a project manager, and I consider this as part of a communication which is delegation. You can't just go and talk to everybody and give instructions to everybody yourself because you have to respect the organization structure on site, so everybody can communicate and cascade the information properly as per their knowledge and to their teams. I noticed many project managers they go to site, and they communicate with everybody, and this confuses the people. And in many cases, we had major issues out of this because when you go as a project manager on site, you talk to everybody. They have to listen to you because you're the highest authority on site, but at the same time they need to consider that there are section managers that already gave instructions and distributed the resources and equipment based on their schedule. So, if you go and give other instructions this might delay things, this might end up with idle man hours which will cost us more.

[music]

0:43:57 RK: I would like to take this opportunity also to explain to you one more thing, about manpower optimization and distribution. People think that if you need to finish earlier, you can increase the manpower on certain activity or delete certain activities. Well usually, when... It is very, very, very useful to introduce a very efficient incentive scheme for the employees. And we tried this in many cases and it was successful. On one of our projects, we were behind schedule by one month almost and we met with the client, and we decided to reduce the manpower by 20% and finish on time. So what we did is basically, we reduced the manpower by 20%, okay? And let's assume it's 20 employees, and 20 by 10 hours a day that's 200 hours. Right? 200 hours by 30 hours a month, that's 6,000 hours. Right? So, we gave 3,000 hours of these 6,000 to the remaining manpower as incentive in case they finish earlier.

0:45:21 KL: 3,000 hours of compensation values?

0:45:25 RK: We reduced 6,000 hours by cutting down the manpower, and we gave half of these

man hours to the people that are actually remaining and working on site as incentive. For example, if you work eight hours, and you produce more than you should produce, and you are ahead of schedule, we pay you 11 hours.

[music]

0:45:54 KL: So it's kind of like an earn value game?

0:45:56 RK: Because we kept... The 80% that we kept were the most productive people on site, and we rewarded the productive people by giving them extra incentive instead of getting paid eight hours for working eight hours, if they were productive we used to pay them eleven but they didn't work overtime. You can't exhaust people working in construction from safety point of view. You can't make them work overtime.

0:46:23 KL: So basically, you incentivize them to work over-productively, which is what you were after.

0:46:27 RK: We figured out, if we give them incentive by giving them extra money which basically, we saved from downsizing the manpower. So this will help boost their production which basically it did.

[music]

0:46:47 KL: To be able to use incentives well, you'd still have to understand the capacity of the individuals.

0:46:50 RK: Yeah.

0:46:51 KL: And this comes from a really strong team orientation that you have on a construction site. Teams also end up in situations of conflict. How is that handled on something of that scale? What would you speak to there from a project manager's perspective?

0:47:05 RK: Lots of projects are usually divided into sections which go in parallel, and each section has a project manager and his team, and basically each section would be minimum \$200 million.

0:47:18 KL: How many people would that be?

0:47:20 RK: I was in charge of around 7,000 myself. So, conflict is inevitable on site, but you can always mitigate this conflict by communication. You have always to be open to listen to others. You have to consider their opinions sometimes even if it is not 100% right, to give them confidence in themselves. You as a project manager, you need to be smart enough to give your people this confidence by communicating with people, meeting with them frequently, working with them. I usually lead by example. I don't like to give instructions and just cross my legs and sit on my desk. I always like to give instructions, discuss with the team and work with my team and this is also very important and it reduces conflict big time.

[music]

0:48:18 KL: Is it really much like a kind of a team environment or a coach environment where there's a lot of communication with the leadership on site?

0:48:26 RK: You have to be mean and lean. You have to coach and you have to be part of the team. So that's what's difficult about construction. You have to strike a balance between being a coach, being a leader, being a team player as well.

0:48:40 KL: How do you show that you're a team play on a construction site? How does that work?

0:48:43 RK: By leading by example. Let me give you one example. We made a study and we realized that the most wasted hours for the workers, or for the employees are early morning when they arrive, after lunch time and before they leave.

0:49:00 KL: [chuckle] That's a lot of the window.

0:49:01 RK: Yeah, so that's lots of time wasted. And why? Because there is nobody of the supervision staff available on site. So, instead of telling the people, or your team or your supervision team and managers, "You need to be on site." All you need to do is to gather the team, go with them, stay with them early morning. But when people come to work and see that all the supervision and managers are on site, just their presence, will make the people feel that if the management is coming early and starting early, we need to move better. If I want to tell my managers or the section managers, "You need to be present," and I'm not doing that myself, I don't think they would take it seriously as much as if I was there and they saw me there.

[music]

0:50:00 KL: Do you have measures or statistics that are indicating when one type of communication structure is used versus another that you see a difference in output, or productivity, or quality?

0:50:10 RK: I can tell you the difference between being a project manager and being a micromanager.

0:50:16 KL: [chuckle] Oh, do tell.

0:50:16 RK: There is a major, huge difference in productivity. Like you and I, we know what we do. We're experienced. And if your boss keeps nagging on your head that, "I need this, I need that. You need to do this, you need to do that." And you know what you're going to do, but you have a certain... You have level of comfort in how you need to execute things. So if he's not trusting you, if he's on top of you all the time, you won't be productive, right?

0:50:42 KL: Right.

0:50:43 RK: This is communication skill. You always need to give people trust, or let's say a certain level of trust. Give them flexibility to be creative. Give them flexibility to do the job the way they see proper. You should not intervene without giving people chances. I consider micromanagement is a communication issue, it's not a management issue.

[music]

0:51:09 KL: Have you seen a breakdown in communication on construction sites that has jeopardized the work plan though?

0:51:15 RK: Yeah, of course.

0:51:15 KL: How does a communications breakdown change essentially your ability to perform to scope?

0:51:20 RK: Yeah, I will give you one example that I've seen on one of the projects. Communication was going up and down, left and right, so let's say in all directions, without being streamlined. And at the end of the day, some of the key team members, they quit. And they quit in the peak of the project. So this is due to bad communication from the project manager, downwards. So, in order to replace these people, who started from the beginning, who knows their team, and they are good team members. The problem with this is that when these people quit due to communication issues, the good people quit.

0:52:03 KL: Right.

0:52:04 RK: And this created a major issue because we could not replace these people immediately. So, the breakdown and the wrong communication ended up with some people quitting, ended up with people frustrated because their bosses quitted, and their bosses used to support them, so their productivity went down. The project was seriously affected.

[music]

0:52:31 KL: Have you seen how communication structures around these large projects affect quality or how quality is handled?

0:52:37 RK: Communication is related to quality as well. Because if you don't know how to communicate clearly, and if you push your people too much with your communications, they will rush things and you will end up with bad quality. You need to know when, how, and why to talk to everybody and when to say things and how to say it and to what extent to be pushy, to what extent to be, let's say mean and lean. [chuckle] No, no, I'm serious. You need to be very well experienced in order to be able to handle big construction projects, otherwise you will end up with a mess on site.

[music]

0:53:13 KL: So, how is this learned?

0:53:14 RK: I have a civil engineering background and I started as a site engineer. Then section manager, then project engineer and so on. You need to go through all these steps. You need to work in every position in order to be able, when you become a project manager, to put yourself in others' shoe and know what they would think because you were in their place one day.

0:53:39 KL: I'm hearing a lot about self-awareness and awareness of others. This is kind of the emotional... What do they call it? The emotional IQ? The EQ, emotional quotient?

0:53:48 RK: You need to be smart enough to know how to communicate with people, take the best out of them and at the same time reward them for what they do. They will get better, you will take what you need and your project will be safe. If you have a good team that's working since a long time management team, you can make proper planning, you can make proper estimation, you can make proper risk plans, mitigation plans, you can make proper quality management plans, everything, right?

0:54:14 KL: Mm-hmm.

0:54:15 RK: To implement all these, it goes down to what? To how you communicate these things. If you have a strong base, planning, estimation, risk, everything, and you communicate wrongly all these things, then it's useless.

[music]

0:54:34 KL: Talk to me about stakeholders, and particularly external stakeholders. So your team are clearly stakeholders in this. What is the role of the communication a project manager has externally when you look at it from a construction perspective?

0:54:45 RK: Let's take the client and the owner as the stakeholder, okay?

0:54:50 KL: Oh yeah.

0:54:51 RK: Okay. So, if you build a proper and good relationship with the client and he trusts you, then life would be easier for you throughout the project. All you need to do is to keep them informed and to be always honest with them. I remember, I went to one of the projects from the beginning of the project. They sent me there just to make relations with our client. So in the previous project before this, I noticed that... I was not the project manager, but I was part of the project...so I noticed that if something goes wrong on site, they tried to hide it and to fix it without the knowledge of the client. So one time the client discovered this, and he made a big issue and he issued a non-conformance report, which delayed the site for weeks. At the same time, in this new project, my thinking always is you have to be straightforward and honest, because people who are clients are educated and understand that mistakes happens and they are on the same boat with you. You are one team. They are not police officers. So in this new project, I built a good relationship in the beginning of the project. I kept them involved in everything, so they never raised any non-conformance report with us and they always kept supporting us by telling us how to do things and how we can work together to fix the problem.

[music]

0:56:21 KL: So what do we need to do to be teaching project managers, because it sounds like, I think communications often gets described as, "Make sure you have a communications plan, right? Make sure you have the tools necessary to move information around."

0:56:33 RK: You need to do team building sessions. We depend too much on pictorial stuff, we

depend too much on presentations. But we need to enhance our practical team building.

0:56:48 KL: So one of the things we need to learn are some skills in team building and working together as team. So that's something it sounds like it should be built into our education better, so that as project managers, we are doing the team building.

0:57:00 RK: Exactly, and this is what I need as a project manager. To work in a very good environment where team building is always there, where teams assist each other, where project managers always advise each other and work as a team to make sure all projects are accomplished successfully.

[music]

0:57:26 KL: With that teamwork, we get more productivity, reduce risk, better quality.

0:57:31 RK: And last week, one of the project managers, he sent a note that something happened in his project and it was avoided by doing this and that. And actually, the same would have happened in my project, but because I was aware of what happened and he sent to everybody and made everybody alert in the group, I was aware and nothing happened. If you want to do proper team building, you need to be unselfish.

0:57:58 KL: I would say, "Don't hoard information."

0:58:00 RK: Open communication is important. Always be honest with the client, be honest with yourself, be honest with your employer, and life will be good.

0:58:10 KL: Rami makes some excellent points. Set up a communications management plan at the start of the project, trust your team members to know what they're doing, don't micromanage, be honest. Don't try to hide problems or difficulties with your clients, because remember, you're all on the same team. Check out Rami's blog, "Project is the Game, Management is the Frame and Success is the Name" on projectmanagement.com.

So to sum it all up, PMs, if you want to deliver a top notch project, you need an optimally functioning team. Addressing that does not mean you're getting warm and fuzzy. This is actually one of the hard issues that a good project manager should tackle head on. That means devoting time to team building. It means modeling the behavior that you expect from others. It means establishing effective channels of communication and it means providing support for the individuals on your team. If you're new to the game, don't be discouraged, you'll get better with time, because when it comes to managing your team, experience is truly the best teacher.

Special thanks to my guest, Paul Pelletier, Lisa DiTullio and Rami Kaibni.

0:59:11 S5: Our theme music was composed by Molly Flannery, used with permission. Additional original music by Gary Fieldman, Rich Greenblatt, Lionel Lyles, and Hiroaki Honshuku. Post production performed at M Powered Strategies and technical and web support provided by Potomac Management Resources.

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