

## Leader as Initiator

As team leader, you must initiate action. Though effective leaders don't tell people what to do, they draw attention to the actions essential for meeting the team's goals. Good team leaders are well positioned to initiate action because they usually stand somewhat apart from the day-to-day work of their team—where they can more easily observe the connections between that work and the project's higher-level objectives. While team members are deeply enmeshed in tasks and problem solving, the leader pays continual, close attention to the expectations of the project sponsor, the project manager, and external stakeholders. Using evidence and rational argument, the leader encourages team members to take the steps needed to meet those larger expectations. Not surprisingly, the team leader role is an important function, particularly when the sponsor's and other stakeholders' expectations conflict with individual team members' personal expectations.

## Leader as Model

Traditional managers and team leaders can use their own behavior to shape others' behavior and performance. The big difference is that team leaders must rely more heavily on this tactic, since they cannot rely on promotions, compensation, and threats of dismissal to influence team members.

A team leader's behavior is, in fact, a powerful tool. It sets a standard that others feel compelled to meet or even exceed, if only to avoid seeming ineffective or petty. As team leader, you can model team behavior in many different ways. For example, if you believe that your team members should get out of the office and rub shoulders with internal customers, don't just instruct them to do so. Instead, begin a regular practice of traveling to customer locations yourself, creating customer focus groups, and so forth. Your very actions will encourage team members to participate. In a word, you want to model behaviors that exert a direct impact on your team's performance.

## Leader as Negotiator

"I'd like Bill to join our performance-improvement team," said team leader Sue to Bill's manager. The manager frowned; Bill was one of his best employees. "Being part of the team will involve an estimated four hours of work each week," Sue continued. "And that includes meetings and team assignments."

As you may have realized, most managers don't particularly welcome requests such as Sue's. They understand that a project team has important goals, but so do the managers who are asked to contribute skilled employees and other resources. Complying with a team leader's request can only make their jobs more difficult. Effective team leaders recognize this and use their negotiating savvy to obtain the personnel and other resources they need. The project sponsor can facilitate the process by making it clear that the project's goals are important to the company and that he or she expects managers to cooperate.

The best way to negotiate with resource providers is to frame the situation in a positive way-as mutually beneficial. A mutually beneficial negotiation occurs when both parties recognize opportunities for gain. If you are a project team leader, you will have a better chance of framing your negotiations as good for both parties if you do the following:

- Emphasize the higher-level goals of the organization, and explain how successful team action will contribute to those goals. You'll underscore a point we'll examine in more detail later in this book-that project goals must support organizational goals.
- Emphasize how the other party will benefit by helping the project-for example, by indicating how the project's success will contribute to the other party's success.

To be a successful negotiator, present yourself as trustworthy and reliable, and describe realistic mutual benefits.

### **Leader as Listener**

A good project team leader spends as much time listening as talking. Through listening, you gather signals from the environment-indications of impending trouble, team member discontent, and opportunities for gain. You also look for opportunities to leverage your team members' diverse knowledge, skills, and insights. When team members know you're listening, they'll more willingly share what they know or what they perceive happening inside and outside the team. By listening well, you can recommend actions informed by the experience and knowledge of many people.

### **Leader as Coach**

A good project team leader finds ways to help team members excel. In most cases, you can accomplish this through coaching. Coaching is a two-way activity in which the parties share knowledge and experience to maximize a team member's potential and help him or her achieve agreed-upon goals. It is a shared effort in which the person being coached participates actively and willingly. Good team leaders find coaching opportunities in the course of everyday business. Their coaching can help members with many routine activities-such as making better presentations, scheduling their work, dealing with conflict within the team, obtaining external resources, setting up a budget, developing skills, or even working effectively in a team environment.

Coaching opportunities are especially prevalent within teams. Why? Many team members must develop particular needed skills as their projects unfold. For example, script writer you recruited for your strategy-communication video team may suddenly find that she must prepare and present a businesslike progress report to senior management. She must develop presentation skills quickly-and coaching from you can help.

### **Leader as Working Member**

A project team leader must also pitch in and do a share of the work, particularly in areas where he or she has special competence. Ideally, that share will include one or two of the unpleasant or unexciting jobs that no one really wants to do. Pitching in solidifies the perception that you're a member of the team, not a traditional boss. The payoff? Greater team cohesion and dedication.

What are the characteristics of a person who can do most, or all, of the things just described? For starters, a project team leader should have the leadership skills we are all acquainted with: the ability to set a direction that others will follow, good communication skills, the ability to give and to accept feedback, integrity, and high standards for performance. Beyond these, he or she should have a positive attitude toward team-based work-and preferably experience with it. If you're a project manager looking for an effective team leader, the last person you'd want to fill the job would be someone who insists on acting like a traditional boss.

The team leader should also enjoy credibility among team members. That means having appropriate skills and experience and a reputation for dealing effectively with others. Lack of credibility can lead to ridicule and a highly dysfunctional situation.

## **Choosing a Project Team Leader**

If you're a project manager, you may designate a team leader if the project is of very short duration, if there is an immediate need for a team (as in a crisis), or if there is an organizational reason for a certain person to be the team leader (such as giving a competent younger employee an opportunity to learn and practice leadership skills). In other situations, the team may select its own leader-or rotate the leadership post and its responsibilities on a regular basis.

### **One Leader or Several?**

For many of us, the notion of team leadership evokes the image of a single leader. To be sure, investing leadership in a single person ensures that authority has an undivided voice. After all, how would a team get things done if it had two bickering leaders? Whose direction would people follow? However, the experience of teams indicates that investing leadership in a single person is not an absolute necessity as long as there is agreement among leaders on means and ends. The only necessity is that leaders are of one mind as to their goal and its importance.

A project that brings together many people representing two or more technical specialties may, in fact, benefit from multiple leadership-particularly if the leaders report to a single project manager. For example, a team whose goal was to establish a new recruiting Web site had a project manager and four area leaders: a technical leader, a user interface leader, a site strategy leader, and a content leader. Each leader reported to the project manager, and each had responsibility for a unique aspect of the project's work. Within these areas of responsibility, team leaders had authority to make decisions and allocate resources. Only when their decisions affected other teams, the project plan, the budget, or the schedule were they required to seek approval from the project manager or other high-level authority. See "Team Leader's To-Do List" for more details about this role.