

Work Passion and Heart as Critical Behaviors: What Every Project Manager Should Bear in Mind...

By

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Many project managers have likely been subjected to “resource selection” well before they knew what selection criteria, roles and responsibilities, or project management for that matter was. Many may recall their elementary or primary school days, and perhaps the selection of sports team members in the school yard or playground. Typically, two captains were likely chosen by someone in authority (such as the sports teacher), and then each captain selected their teams based on a perceived ability to perform, the positions or roles they needed, and maybe how well the captain thought the people would fit into their team. That was then. Fast forward to today. School yard “captains” are now the equivalent of project managers and/or resource line managers, and their “sports team” has become the project team. How different is your project resource selection from that of the school yard and do certain risks exist in your current approach?

It is commonplace to create a project “roles and responsibility matrix” to define required team members (also referred to as “resources”), and the skills and competencies required to effectively staff a project. The organizational environment in which you work will dictate how much flexibility you have as the project manager in the team members selected for your project. You may rely on functional managers to provide all resources, based on the needs you have indicated, or you may pull from an available resource pool and have all or some control in selecting your specific project team (this latter approach is typically the case in a matrix or projectized organizational system). What is important to recognize is the criteria for which project team members are evaluated and selected. Does the criteria you use solely rely on the hard and soft skills each team member must possess, or does it lack detail on the technical and professional competencies for your project? If so, we contend that an element of risk exists in your project roles and responsibility matrix that may ultimately impact the success of your project.

Let us elaborate. Consider the example where your project is an agreed “top priority” for the enterprise. The CEO or other authorized person assigns his or her best people to oversee the project and to give you, the project manager, the control to finalize all required team members. On the surface, this is a good situation for the project manager to be in. After all, how can the project fail, if staffed with the best possible talent available that you can choose? The key is to make sure the most *appropriate* people are selected. Choosing the best functional expert does not necessarily translate to performing well within the confines of a specific project. We have all probably been on a project with strong functional team members. Having a strong functional representative can be powerful when it is leveraged in the right

way, but it can cause tension if too much reliance is given to functional department needs and not enough on the project needs, with no consideration to how the whole team will “gel” together. Project resourcing decisions need to go beyond a functional skills assessment.

This idea is not new; followers of traditional leadership and management disciples will recognize similar suggestions put forth by the likes of Ram Charan, and the Blanchard Group. Ram Charan, in his book, “Execution – The Discipline of Getting Things Done”ⁱ, speaks of effective leaders for organizations must possess “Heart” and that lack of heart will add risk or could lead to a failure to execute. The Blanchard Group has published works on the “Work Passion” of employees and how a lack of work passion poses a risk to the organization.

The Blanchard Group defines work passion as, “Work Passion is an individual’s persistent, emotionally positive, meaning-based state of well-being stemming from continuous, reoccurring cognitive and affective appraisals of various job and organizational situations, which results in consistent, constructive work intentions and behaviors.”ⁱⁱ

The crux of this position is that, when team members lack the passion or heart for the work they are assigned, there is significantly more risk to the success of the activity they are assigned to perform. Passion and “heart” correlate directly to motivation. Less motivated people increase risk to a task’s successful execution. Within the confines of Project Management, this situation is very real. A project team member who lacks passion or heart is at risk of missing deadlines, or may cause roadblocks and tensions, and perhaps significant team disruption. Passion is not the only behavior or competency one must evaluate, but it is certainly a key one and it is an area of focus for us in this article.

What measures can a project manager take to ensure their team selection gives due consideration to work passion and heart?

1. Do not base your team selection solely on functional skills. Selection criterion should include personal behaviors and traits as to provide a more comprehensive perspective of the person. This may include official performance review outputs, key behavior indicators, and past peer, manager and Direct reports reviews. For example, has the person recently been given a positive review, or have they been passed over for a promotion? Have they shown real team spirit on past project, or is there evidence of derailing behavior on past projects? These are all vital questions a project manager should know before staffing a person to the project.
2. Conduct interviews and ask questions beyond the skills assessment. If your situation does not allow for this (for example, if you are taking over an existing team), there should always be one on one on-boarding sessions with each project member so that you can get to know them, their motivates and behaviors (these would be “starting on-boarding meetings if they are new, or if you are the new project manager, get to know them with one on one interviews). Such an action should not be a one-off meeting. Have recurring meetings with each resource, as their behaviors, motives and desires are likely to change throughout the project. The frequency of each recurring routine should be based on the criticality of the resource to the project. The more critical the resource is, the more frequently your routine should be.
3. Ensure you hold team meetings and gatherings, particularly when milestones are reached – take the time to celebrate your successes.



4. Add all risks about team structure and strategy to the project’s risk register, and make sure the right actions are taken to prevent them turning into issues. Base the severity of each risk on the outcomes of the routines. If you start to see behaviors of any team member changing in a negative way, update the risk and know when to set a prescribed mitigation plan into action. As a project manager, you must be prepared to take the lead on this, regardless of the person in question. A team member may have been a “superstar” on one project, but if they show signs of behavior that is detrimental to the current project you will need to “quash it”.

In conclusion, when you are setting up your project team, basing your resource and team structure decisions entirely on functional skills adds risk to your project. Focus also on personal behaviors and traits of potential candidates to join your team – a core element of which is passion and heart for the work at hand. Once people are already in place, ensure you can continue to ensure the team performs effectively

ⁱ “Execution – The Discipline of Getting Things Done”, Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan, published by Crown Business, New York, New York 2002.

ⁱⁱ From Engagement to Work Passion © 2009 The Ken Blanchard Companies.

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