

Project Leader: The Missing Piece



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Every year Executive Leadership prepare for the next round of acquisitions, mergers, capital expenditures and program updates. A project manager is then selected who is expected to use knowledge, tools, and techniques to meet the project requirements. Sounds easy enough, but then reality hits.

Most projects fail! And at an alarming rate. A project that doesn't meet schedule, budget or quality targets is considered a failure. Most organizations have 70% project failure rates [source: [4 PM](#)], and approximately 75 percent of all ERP projects fail [source: [Gartner: 75% of all ERP projects fail – But why? | Office ...](#)]. In this highly aggressive environment if companies can increase their project success rate it becomes a competitive edge.

My experience in the Air Force demonstrated the success of any mission is founded in leadership. The best leaders are those who lead from the front, commit fully to the mission, and work alongside team members toward the goal. These are the fundamentals that I relied on over the last 2 and half years as I transitioned newly acquired sites from Big Pharma to a startup Contract Development and Manufacturing Organization.

The success of each transition was a result of traveling to be the on-site Project leader. Fully committed to the company's approach that most site and legacy Big Pharma teams never realized I was a contractor. I worked with site personnel, integration vendors, and the executive team to overcome obstacles. Each site was an incredible success, and the company came to regard transition as one of its core competencies.

Although project managers may have the tools, techniques, and programs to monitor a project, they rarely have the training and experience to lead one. The days of project managers hidden away in a back room tracking the project schedule are no longer relevant. Today's project manager must be an **Entrepreneurial Leader**, "thrive in uncertainty, passionate desire to own projects, and uniquely skilled at persuasion," [Timothy Butler](#), Harvard Business Review. Simply put the Project Leader of today must be:

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1. **Bold** – in a changing environment choose to be in action instead of reaction
2. **Invested** – anticipate risks and make project success a personal goal
3. **Communicative** – be a real time leader leaving an enduring impact on the project team

The success of projects requires a dynamic Project Leader that has the commitment and ability to will a team to success. Large companies may have a handful of these people waiting for a project. However, mid-size and smaller companies may find it challenging to locate such an entrepreneurial leader, but there is hope.

For companies to improve projects success rates they need to alter their approach. First, the conventional perception of what makes a good Project Manager needs to evolve to keep up with ever-changing business demands. Next, companies need talent that will “break” the mold, not “fit” the mold. Finally, entrepreneurial project leaders are needed, but recruitment processes need to be updated to find that type of resource. The industry is slowly moving in the right direction, but until that change occurs the Contract Project Leader is here to fill the void.

About the Author: Scott has 20+ years’ experience in leadership positions delivering multifaceted, business transformation programs in both the Air Force and the Pharmaceutical industry including equipment installations, operational improvements, major system deployments and manufacturing facility acquisition and integration.

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