

Communication
&
Relationships
in
Project Management
or

The importance of being earnest

Overview

- Three stories of my professional experiences as a project manager on assignment
 - Oiso, Japan
 - Talouse, France
 - Everett, Washington
- One story of a classroom experience that didn't go so well
 - Communication class at City U

Recurring themes

- Integrity
- Authenticity
- Honor
- Compassion
- Courage

Japan

- **Situation**

- Teaming with supply chain management group implementing Kan Ban pull processes on factory floor
- The home team did not want me there and had decided to minimally work with me – only enough to satisfy requirements of the assignment
- All communication was through interpreter

- **Actions**

- Worked closely with our interpreter, developing rapport and confidence with her in my interactions.
- Emphasized politeness and shared confidences
- Independent research – asking for some pretty raw extracts from the management system
- Shared what I interpreted as a confidence with the team leader
- Suggested our targets were very low and easy to achieve
- Asked if he agreed

- **Results**

- On the end of the second day, the team leader came to me and, in perfect English, told me of team decision to sanction me. After seeing how respectful of them I was; that I knew the business; that I was genuinely interested in what the team thought, they had unanimously decided to work with me
- Ultimately – the collaborative effort of this team far exceeded our targets as we worked together to first achieve them and then set higher targets

Japan

Lessons Learned

People will gift you trust if they think you're worthy

- Information Seeking Strategies
 - Be free with your confidences, encouraging others to be free with theirs.
 - Not revealing everything you already know.
 - Offer what you know first.
 - A bold and direct question.
 - Dissemble.
- When Information Seeking; know that....
 - Many people will tell you what they think you want to hear.
 - Plato, Tocqueville, Machiavelli, Orwell
 - People won't often tell you the truth because they do not want to compromise themselves.
 - Macbeth
 - The power of the leader can get in the way of people telling the truth.
 - Caesar, Confucius, Elizabeth I
 - Leaders must be aware of the dangers of optimism and preconceived ideas.
 - Augustine
 - How you go about information seeking speaks to your character.
 - Pliny the Younger, in serving Emperor Trajan



France

- **Situation**

- Leading a team of Boeing and Labinal engineers to establish meaningful metrics, communication plans, and an operating rhythm
- French Team wanted me there as part of team, and had low expectations

- **Actions**

- Began speaking French day one
- Learned to ask politely in French for what I needed – asked politely in English with same phrasing if time constrained – emphasized Good manors in everything
- Followed through on issues brought to me – kept my word
- Asked why, a lot and with naïve enthusiasm and genuine curiosity – no bad guys; the condition is just what's so, and...so what

- **Results**

- Developed a communication plan and metrics model that has become the partner benchmark
- Honest, and high quality conversations between teams
- Both teams wanted me to stay on

France

Lesson Learned

Processes provide a safe space for people to take risks

Process Roles:

- Convert charter and plan into actions
- Influence behavior
- Help to reveal intent behind behaviors

High –performing Team

Core Processes:

- Team meetings
- Roles and responsibilities
- Communication
- Decision making
- Performance metrics
- Feedback



Good Team Processes

- Depersonalize
- Promote transparency
- Promotes dialogue
- Creates inclusion and engagement
- Egalitarian

Adapted from Wong (2007)

Everett

- **Situation**

- Side of Body modification of 787 - Critical to the first flight milestone
- Started with myself; 12 engineers and 200 post its on a wall
- Developed into over 200 Design Eng's, Test Eng's, Mfg Eng's, Tooling, Fabrication, Factory Ops, and a PMO of 6
- This was the tent pole item for first flight

- **Actions**

- High integrity in high pressure situations
- Consistent and appropriate behaviors
- Listened a great deal – provided what was needed and wanted
- Became an integral and respected part of the team

- **Results**

- This team accomplished in 5 ½ months what would normally take 18 months
- Some of the engineers were nationally recognized for contributions to the understanding of carbon fiber technology and testing directly from their work on this team
- 787 flew December 3rd

Everett

Lessons Learned

Those organizations who will succeed are those that evoke greatest human capacities - our need to be in good relationships, and our desire to contribute to something beyond ourselves.

These qualities cannot be evoked through procedures and policies.

They only are available in organizations where people feel trusted and welcome, and where people know that their work matters.

- Go slow to go fast
- Work only one process at a time
- Use frequent process checks
- Live by the 80-20 rule
- Know when to cut discussion off and park an issue
- Know how to open and narrow thinking (and avoid group think)
- Know how to “force” a decision



City U Communication Class

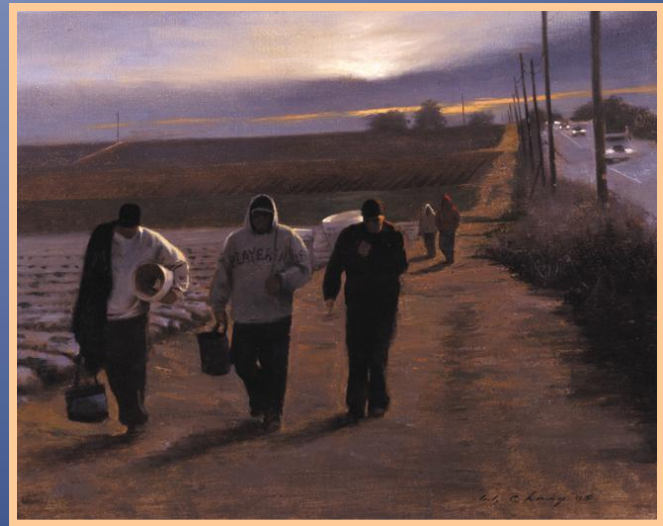
- **Situation**
 - Team of 15 people scattered across the country attempting to run a business in chaos by email
- **Actions**
 - Demanded team members respond to e-mails daily
 - Put team information in locations not everyone could access and then insisted those that could not get access upgrade their computers and or software
 - When no one responded to e-mails – we sent more e-mails asking for responses
 - Almost no one attempted to call or help other team members
- **Results**
 - More than just a failure of the team to function or produce a result
 - Team members were angry with each other
 - Many felt betrayed
 - None felt appreciated and an us vs the PM mentality pervaded the group

City U Communications Class

Lessons Learned

Relationships give meaning to our lives and what attach us to our workplace community.
It's all about relationships.

End of Day II,
Warren
Chang



Grounding Thoughts

- Recounted my experiences
 - Your experience may differ
- What's made a difference for me has been a relentless pursuit of the following principles:
 - Authenticity
 - Honesty
 - Compassion
 - Integrity
 - Courage
- What might make a difference for you?
- In “The Leader Mystical” Kets de Vries , invites leaders to self analyze their management style to find and understand the deepest reasons for their management style.
 - Our nature and style are usually influenced by childhood events and that affects our environment and the organization we evolve in.
 - Being self aware of our “disabilities” allows us to grow beyond them and to develop leadership skills which are not limited by conditioned patterns of behavior
 - Whether, I am led, or leading, or working with peers, I am always in relationships, always observed, seen and perceived by others. (Shaaron Alvares)
 - Understand that a top leader is a group’s collective identity.

Grounding Thoughts

Jessica Biel (2009)

- I see the idea of a mirror in two ways. One way is using another individual as your mirror to show you the type of person you want to be. The other is looking into a mirror using someone who looks to you as a leader.
- Leaders engage in Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership: (1) Model the way; (2) Inspire shared vision; (3) Challenge the process; Enable others to act; Encourage the heart.
- When I look around at the people I value as great leaders I see them doing these exact things.
- According to Kets de Vries, "As merchants of hope', leaders need to be able to speak to the collective imagination of their people, vividly describing a dream that can be shared in a way that contributes to a group identity." (2002)
- References
 - Kets de Vries, M. (2002). *The Personality Audit*. Retrieved May 2, 2009, from Manfred Kets de Vries: www.ketsdevries.com
 - White, B. (n.d.). *Seven Personal Characteristics of a Good Leader*. Retrieved May 2, 2009, from Ezine @rticles: www.ezinearticles.com

George Bernard Shaw

The greatest obstacle to communication is
the belief that it has occurred