

## Learn how to create a dysfunctional team and make everyone mad at you

**We are pleased to welcome a new guest columnist Samoht (Sam) Lahcom, to provide project management advice to members of The International Community of Project Managers. Sam has an MPP from the IMP Institute in West Bromo, Fuuumistan.**

**Sam may or may not be submitting a regular monthly column in the future.**

**Dear Sam,**

*I recently took over a project from a prior manager who was promoted. The project team seems to be working productively and everyone gets along well with each other. We are hitting our deadline dates – sometimes even a little early. Our customers are very supportive and happy. They have offered to withhold any scope change requests until this initial set of requirements is implemented in production.*

*Everything seems to be going well – perhaps too well.*

*Every team I have been on in the past had problems. I feel a little uneasy without some conflicts. It is healthy. The prior manager fashioned a high-performing team, but they appear to all be on autopilot. Do you have any other ideas for how I can shake things up?*

*Hapi D.*

**The following reply is from the official desk of Samoht Lahcom.**

Hapi,

You certainly have a situation that I have not run into very often. You may have a good thing going, but as they say – too much of a good thing can actually be bad for you. Teams are made up of people, and it seems that people always have misunderstandings, miscommunication and tension. I have some ideas for you as the project manager, that may help, as you say, “shake things up”.

### **Communicate poorly**

Have you been on a project where the project manager is a poor communicator? This trait usually results in a miserable project experience for everyone. First, give unclear instructions when you hand out work so that people are not quite sure if they are doing things right or not. Of course, don't provide status updates so that people can see the progress being made. Keep the overall status of the project to yourself.

### **Don't praise or complement anyone**

When people on your team do a good job, just act like they are finally meeting your expectations. People don't expect money or gifts when they do a good job – just a pat on the back and a ‘well done’ by their manager. Don't give it to them. Then they will start to wonder why they bother to work hard, and their performance will start to degrade.

### **Don't set clear expectations**

People like to understand what is expected of them so that they know the challenges they need to meet. Since you are the project manager, you can thwart this desire. When you hand out work assignments, give a deadline date, but then shorten the deadline just as the activities are coming due. When a team member is creating a paper deliverable, like a testing plan, don't give them any guidance on how it should be prepared, but then complain that it is not what you wanted when they send it to you.

### **Overcommit on behalf of your team**

Your customers are being too nice by holding back on change requests. They have a business to run. They should expect the team to meet 100% of their needs. Let them make changes to the requirements, but don't use any kind of scope change process. Just tell them that your team can get the new work done within the existing budget and deadlines. You will accomplish two things. Your team members will be upset at you, and you will get high customer satisfaction ratings.

### **Have everyone work overtime to make up for the problems you caused**

This is the one where you should see the payback in terms of team friction. As you know, people usually don't mind working overtime when the business needs demand it. However, based on the items we have already discussed, no one will enjoy working overtime because of poor communication, unclear or wrong expectation setting, and scope not being managed effectively. The team will start to grumble and complain, and productivity will suffer as a result.

### **The bottom of the line**

Hapi, the project manager has a lot of control over the dynamics and morale of the team by the way they manage processes and people. I have just given you some of the characteristics of a poor project manager. There are many others as well. If you start to emulate these traits, you will join the legion of other project managers who communicate poorly, provide vague assignments, don't praise anyone and over commit the team. In other words, you are in good company. I wish you the best of luck in your quest to "shake things up".