

Edition

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Editors' Association of Canada, Toronto branch

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Program Report

Project Managers: How to Have It Your Way

by Sharon Aschaiek

“**Y**ou can't always get what you want.”

The Rolling Stones' classic anthem for the frustrated wafted through the densely packed room at 23 Prince Arthur Avenue last month, perfectly setting the stage for a discussion on the thorny issues that can arise for project managers.

Harry Mingail, founder of the writing, training, and project management

service HumanSense.com, and author of the recently published *Project Management Entrepreneuring*, promptly proceeded to turn Mick Jagger's message on its head. He presented a number of strategies for editors who find themselves in the precarious position of possessing influence without authority—that is, being given control over the nature and scope of a project, but not formal authority over others involved, especially with respect to hiring and firing.

With every project in which you get involved, Mingail said, start by



Harry Mingail tells EAC Toronto members about project management.

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assessing yourself and your level of control.

“How influential are you? Do you control resources such as money, people, information, and machinery?” he asked.

One of the keys to obtaining and maintaining influence when managing a given project for an employer is to establish certain terms from the outset. This means determining exactly what your role and powers will be over the project, ensuring your supervisor alerts your team about your role, your skills, and your authority over the project, and establishing a group of individuals who understand that they are accountable to you.

“No snowflake in an avalanche feels responsible!” Mingail said. “You must have a core group of people accountable to you.”

Where many project managers may hit roadblocks is in the area of feedback, which means it may be time to hone your personal communication skills. Mingail suggests the following seven steps for delivering effective feedback:

- Choose healthy timing.
- State your understanding of the problem.
- Focus on behaviours, not on people.
- Learn more about the problem and try to find points of agreement.
- Identify the options to solve the problem.
- Select an option.
- Create an action plan.

“Feedback can certainly influence people, but if it’s done incorrectly, it can foster hostility and destroy trust,” he said.

Mingail put a new twist on the

golden rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” stating that “Do unto others as they’d like done unto them” is a whole lot more effective. Equally as effective, he said, is the classic WIIFT—What’s in it for them? Both expressions speak to the need to understand your audience—the more you know about the people with whom you work, the more influence you’ll have over them.

“No snowflake in an avalanche feels responsible!”

“It’s not about manipulating people, but about truly understanding them,” Mingail said.

He went on to discuss the usefulness of taking personality tests such as Myers-Briggs, Assertiveness/Responsiveness, DISC (Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, Compliance), and Sensory/Intuitive, which will allow you to better understand yourself, the people you are supervising, and how you relate to them.

Once you start to understand people, Mingail said, you’ll be able to identify what drives your team members and how you can motivate them. He listed some of the prime factors that motivate others: money – personal development – power – recognition – respect – travel – success – challenge

Project managers creating and/or running a team can expect to go through the following stages:

- Forming—creating the right team and agreeing on a common goal

- Storming—experiencing the tumult caused by conflicting opinions as team members figure out the best way to achieve the goal
- Norming—formally and informally establishing norms to follow
- Performing—actively working to achieve the goal in a collectively agreed-upon fashion

Recognizing these stages as the team and project evolve will help the project manager be patient when tensions arise and understand that it’s all part of the process.

Equally as much a part of the process is planning for the unexpected—not just personality clashes, confusion about roles, and insufficient prioritizing, but also logistical obstacles such as suddenly unrealistic deadlines, insufficient funds, and technological glitches. Giving consideration to the unexpected and preparing informal game plans will help in case something should go awry.

A project manager can also achieve influence over others by building upon his or her reputation, making clear past education, experience, expertise, and industry relationships. The more people know about you and your track record, the more respect you’ll receive.

Finally, Mingail tackled the subject that can and does cause many project managers genuine grief: office politics. He advised to completely revamp how we view office politics and to seek out its potential rewards—allies, resources, contacts, and information that can provide an edge in completing a task. **E**