

Take^{the}Lead

Superior **Project Management**

through

Savvy **Interpersonal Communications**



What makes a good project manager great? How do you get what it takes?

Abstract

Studies have shown successful projects are a result of teams with a balance of hard and soft skills. However, we continue to cut back on soft skill development under the assumption that we don't have the time.

Without soft skills such as interpersonal communication, leaders and teams find themselves spending more time repairing problems than working toward a clearly defined goal. This causes the project timeline to slip costing time and money.

This white paper examines the impact of forgoing soft skill development for hard skills in helping good project leaders and teams work better, smarter, and more effectively leading to a successful project.

It will show the weak points poor interpersonal communication skills causes and our sad attempt to strengthen them with short term solutions.

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Why Projects Fail

As Project managers and leaders of Project Offices, we strive for excellent project management skills and become certified in **PMBOK** and **PRINCE2**. We take it up a notch by integrating business process design and continuous improvement through **six sigma** methodologies. We invest in the latest technologies to facilitate processes and project management tasks. Yet project teams continue to fail and struggle to produce expected results.

Projects fail for many reasons. Often cited as a key contributor to failure: *gaps in communication*. Whether specifically called out as a cause itself, or as the discovered root cause of other presenting issues, not addressing communication deficiencies is a crack in the foundation of many project management efforts.

Often project teams focus on critical communications creating and executing a formal project communication plan that is more like a marketing and public relations plan with activities focused at high level tasks and key milestones.

This limited approach only addresses the formal and obvious communication needs. It misses the day to day and unplanned opportunities to keep the project team focused, motivated, and on track to deliver on their promise.

**TEAMS STRUGGLE AND BECOME
STUCK IN A LOOP OF CONFLICT,
REWORK AND FIRE FIGHTING.**

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The Myth and The Impact

Myth: 'Teamwork and people skills are "soft stuff" and our organization can not afford to spend time on those things. We are way too busy on the *real* work.'

Reality: You don't have time *not* to focus on 'soft stuff.' Teams that do not focus on "soft stuff" like interpersonal communication skills and jump directly to doing the tasks of a project plan often find themselves "using untested assumptions, working toward unclear goals, and repairing problems." According to a study done at Johnson and Johnson by a team of organizational development professionals.

Impact: Without effective interpersonal communication skills, the project manager / lead will not be able to understand each team members' strengths and will often underutilize the talents and skills of the team.

The truth is organizations often avoid focusing on 'soft skills' because they are harder to address than the more technical 'hard skills.'

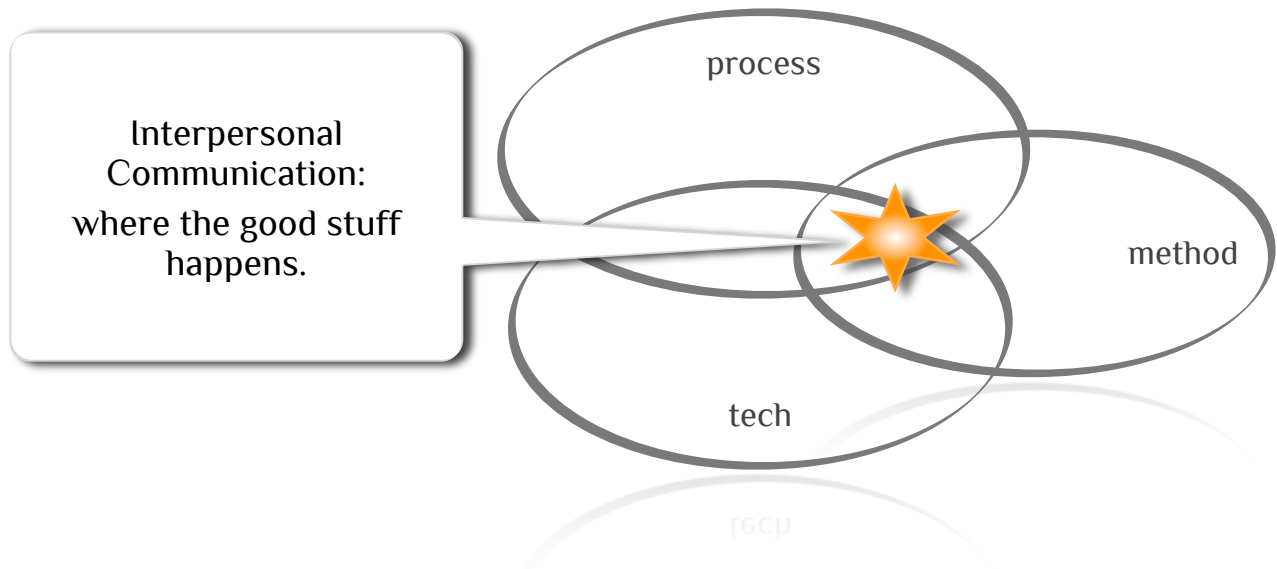
Less effective teams struggle and become stuck in a loop of conflict, rework and fire fighting. This unproductive behavior results in lost time (a particularly precious commodity in this environment), decreased levels of engagement and, ultimately, **lost resources and business opportunities.**"



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Do Soft Skills Matter?



At the intersection of *process*, *technology*, and *methodology* is a core skill of a high performing team member: interpersonal communication.

Observations made over several years within a project management office resulted in a clear distinction between the more successful, in-demand project managers and the average or often struggling project managers. The distinction was their ability to use interpersonal communication skills at every level of the project and with every person who has a stake in it's success.

Even at high levels in organizations, the gap in communication skills are wreaking havoc on performance. Take a look at the 10 mistakes made most according to CIO magazine (Meridith Levinson July 14, 2010).

To truly understand the importance of recognizing these issues, each mistake has been assessed for it's impact on a project and team and recommended behavior changes have been provided.

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Do Soft Skills Matter? Check The Impact

	Communication Mistake	Impact on Project / Team	Behavior Change
1	Speaking in jargon (not being aware of where their knowledge ends and the knowledge of the person they are trying to communicate with begins.)	Crossing functions and even organizations can lead to not just confusion, but a misunderstanding - especially when acronyms are used.	It's better to speak in as simple and clear language as possible - no \$3 words necessary.
2	They complain about technical problems.	When you complain about something, (whether it's technical problems or other concerns) you lose trust and credibility. Nobody likes a whiner. "I can't get this done because he's isn't cooperating."	It's better to state the situation and then move toward a solution than harp on the problem.
3	They speak like sales people.	Using the wrong motivational approach will not only NOT motivate your team, but you may just alienate them. It's more difficult to bring them back than to bring them to you in the first place.	Operational project teams are not motivated like a sales team. Not every individual is motivated by the same thing.
4	They drop the F-bomb.	Loss of credibility and respect which will lead to so many other issues down the line. Dropping the F-bomb will have just as lasting effects as dropping the real bomb. Once you have a reputation of using vulgar language, you will need a professional PR firm to regain respect.	Use emotion to express your concern without dropping the F-bomb.
5	They fail to ask questions - afraid to look like they don't know something or don't already have the answers.	If you are always directing and not asking questions and collaborating, your team will stop offering insight and help. If no one is sharing their experience and knowledge - why have a team at all?	Asking astute questions is critical the the project manager's job for 3 reasons: it elicits critical information and insights; engages the audience; and helps them build relationships with their peers.

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	Communication Mistake	Impact on Project / Team	Behavior Change
6	They impose their brilliant ideas on everyone without building buy-in - having expertise and experience does not mean you know everything.	This often results in a loss of time because of resistance to taking action and questioning along the way.	Curb the confidence. It is important for people to feel they are part of the solution. Build consensus on an idea.
7	They use scare tactics to sell ideas - sometimes oversimplifying and over sensationalizing is used to get action: "if we don't do this we'll all be fired!"	This over exaggeration makes the team feel like the PM is selling them a bill of goods. It is especially ineffective if used frequently.	Convince your audience to take action by presenting a few potential solutions; their pros and cons; and then focus on a balance of facts and emotion: the financial, business, and customer impact.
8	They over-rely on facts.	Often used along with too much jargon, too much technical or analytical data in a presentation will bring people into the weeds and often into analysis paralysis. Not to mention you can be perceived as overcompensating for a lack of confidence or experience.	Moving people to action requires an emotional connection as well as supporting data. Balance your presentation (see #7).
9	Don't adequately explain their idea's or their proposed solution's value.	There is a lack of connecting to the audience here - the presenter is often just one step removed from the real value.	Taking the explanation one step further to explain how that insight / solution will make a difference to your audience. It's the business objective: how is it going to help them sell more or deliver higher quality?
10	They put audiences to sleep with PowerPoint. - people use powerpoint so badly. Too many bullet points, too much information.	This often leads to misunderstanding, lack of cooperation, and let's face it - loss of time (delays) and money (wasted time in meetings.)	Instead - focus an audience around your one thing. Understand powerpoint isn't the only solution.

How We Change

For the serious project manager and leader, true behavior change takes a serious commitment. The psychology of change challenges the common belief that people are essentially rational and we will act in self-interest if we have the right information.

The reality is behavior change is difficult. Simply knowing what to do does not translate into taking different actions. Neither will fear nor force change behaviors - at least not for more than a short time.

Consider the last behavior change you attempted to make in your life. Knowing the change is good for you, you made an attempt to quit smoking; sustain an exercise program; loose and keep off extra weight; or even get up earlier, only to go back to your old habits in a matter of weeks if not days.

Behavior change is difficult.

But there is a way, according to Alan Deutschman, author of Change or Die, the key elements to successful change include:

- a. Relate - form a new emotional relationship with a person or community that inspires (the desired change) and sustains hope.
- b. Repeat - the new relationship helps you learn, practice, and master the new habits and skills that you'll need.
- c. Reframe - The new relationship helps you learn new ways of thinking about your situation and your life (of business.)



"YOU'LL KNOW THAT YOU'RE LEARNING SOMETHING TRULY NEW AND DIFFERENT IF IT'S REALLY HARD FOR A LONG TIME AND YOU'RE CONSTANTLY MAKING MISTAKES AND STRUGGLING AND FEELING LIKE AN IDIOT UNTIL YOU GET BETTER AT IT AND THE HABITS AND SKILLS BECOME AUTOMATIC."

ALAN DEUTSCHMAN

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Where Certification and Training Fall Short

At each stage of a project, communication skills are critical. According to the PMP Examination Content Outline provided by PMI.org, The content of a PMP certification includes not only the key stages of a project, but also the 'Cross-Cutting Knowledge and Skills.'

Project Management Stages

- Initiating
- Planning
- Executing
- Monitoring and Controlling
- Closing

Source: PMI.org

Most importantly the skills listed in the cross-cutting knowledge and skill area include key skills related to interpersonal communication:

- **Active listening**
 - Brainstorming techniques
- **Conflict resolution techniques**
- **Cultural sensitivity and diversity**
 - Data gathering techniques
 - Decision making techniques
- **Facilitation**
 - Information management tools, techniques, and methods
- **Leadership tools and techniques**
- **Negotiating**
- **Oral and written communication techniques, channels and applications**
 - PMI's Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct
- **Presentation tools and techniques**
 - Prioritization / time management
 - Problem-solving tools and techniques
 - Project management software
- **Relationship management**
 - Stakeholder impact analysis
- **Targeting communications to intended audiences** (for example: team, stakeholders, customers)
- **Team motivation methods**

*Skills directly related to interpersonal communication skills are in **bold**.

Unfortunately, the PMP exam itself does **not** have any questions specifically to test many of the communication skills. It is not that these skills are not important, but rather soft skills are difficult to test in a written exam. These interpersonal skills are behaviors that can only be observed.

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How Coaching Closes the Gap

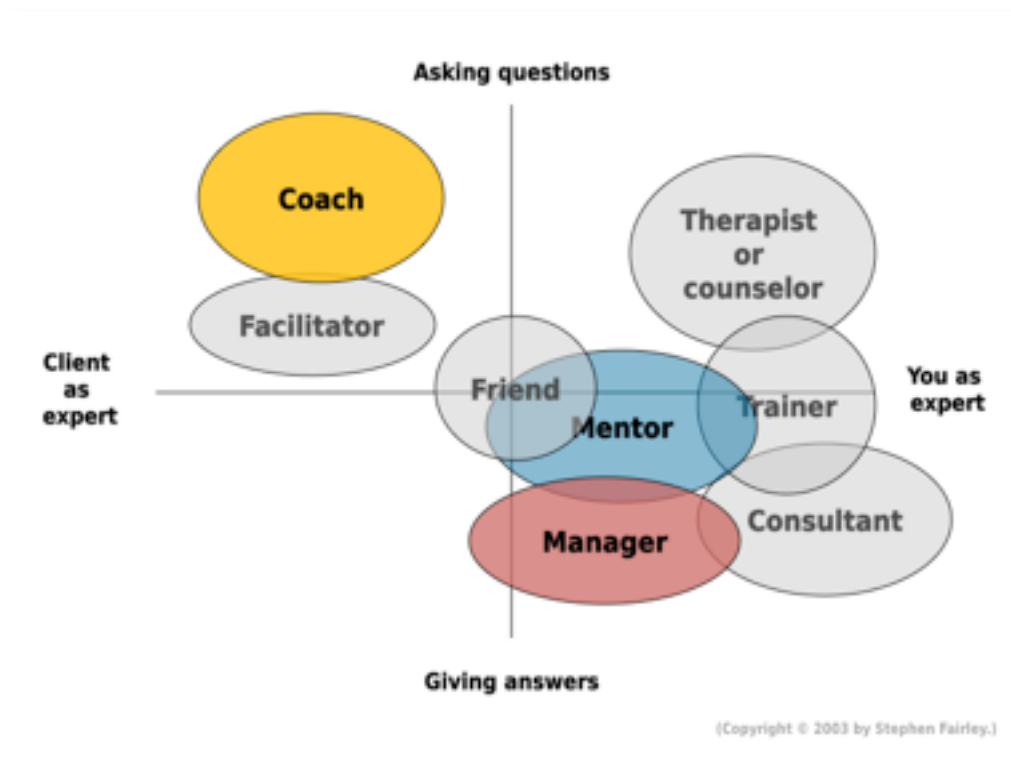
Consider your objective: to help the individuals on your team develop strong interpersonal communication skills in order to become high performing contributors on a high performing team.

Depending upon the approach, your results will be different.

Training will share information - information that you know as an expert. There will be increased awareness, but no sustained learning.

Managing is about giving direction. Often used with fear and force, which does not provide learning or behavior change.

Coaching is about helping the individual develop the strengths within themselves. This is the most sustainable relationship for developing skills.



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Why does training or managing alone not create a high performing team member? Because once the project manager leaves the training room, or if the manager is not there to give direction, then the high performing skills stop.

For the project manager (the 'student') to embody the new behavior it takes time. It takes time and effort. It is more than just experiential learning, it is inquiry learning. Guiding the student to learn herself by giving her the tools and process that is repeatable.

Learning a complex skill such as interpersonal communications is difficult and can be discouraging. Think of the first time you tried to learn to drive a stick shift or play golf.

That's why it's so helpful to have a good coach. A coach will do much more than demonstrate technique and correct errors. She inspires and sustains hope by communicating her belief in you and pointing out the small improvements you're making, which often you don't notice yourself.

Look for programs with these elements

To learn a new complex skill, you may include training in your strategies, but the true learning happens when you *try it* (the new behavior) yourself.

You will fail a few times, allow for this in your plan.

To close the gap, you work with a trusted advisor (a coach) to help pull out the lessons from the failures.

The coach does not give the answers, but rather helps you to learn the process of learning through actual learning.

The solution you choose must provide the key success elements of behavior change and provide:

- the trusted one-on-one relationship,
- built in repetition, and
- reframing required to support behavioral change at the individual level.

Because coaching is tailored to the individual and not a group, it can and does have a more profound and lasting effect on the individual.

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Choose a qualified coach

When selecting your coach, make sure she has the appropriate skills to help you in this behavior change. According to the International Coach Federation, a highly recognized body that certifies coaches worldwide, the skills a coach needs to become a professional certified coach (PCC) are:

- A. Setting the foundation
 - 1. Meeting ethical guidelines and professional standards
 - 2. Establishing the coaching agreement
- B. Co-creating the relationship
 - 3. Establishing trust and intimacy with the client
 - 4. Coaching presence
- C. Communicating effectively
 - 5. Active listening
 - 6. Powerful questioning
 - 7. Direct communication
- D. Facilitating learning and results
 - 8. Creating awareness
 - 9. Designing actions
 - 10. Planning and goal setting
 - 11. Managing progress and accountability

These competencies match the approach needed to make and sustain positive change. Change that results in a project manager that over delivers to the delight of stakeholders.



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Summary

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS ARE THE INVISIBLE FACTORS OF A PROJECT MANAGER'S EXTRAORDINARY SUCCESS. EXECUTIVE COACHING FACILITATES THAT SUCCESS.

With one-fifth of the world's GDP, or more than \$12 trillion, is spent on projects, there is no overstating the *importance* of superior project management skills in any venture.

In an increasingly competitive marketplace marked by economic fluctuations, project managers cannot afford to ignore the *advantage* of developing superior interpersonal communication skills.

Without soft skills such as interpersonal communication, leaders and teams will cost organizations time and money by spending more time repairing problems than working toward a clearly defined goal.

SUCCESSFUL PROJECT MANAGERS NEED A BALANCE OF HARD AND SOFT SKILLS

The distinction between a good project manager and a great one is their ability to use interpersonal communication skills at every level of the project and with every person who has a stake in it's success.

Developing these skills is a behavioral change - and no easy task. But with the right elements (relationship, repetition, reframing) and qualified, trusted advisor, it is possible and sustainable.

Training alone will not sustain change.

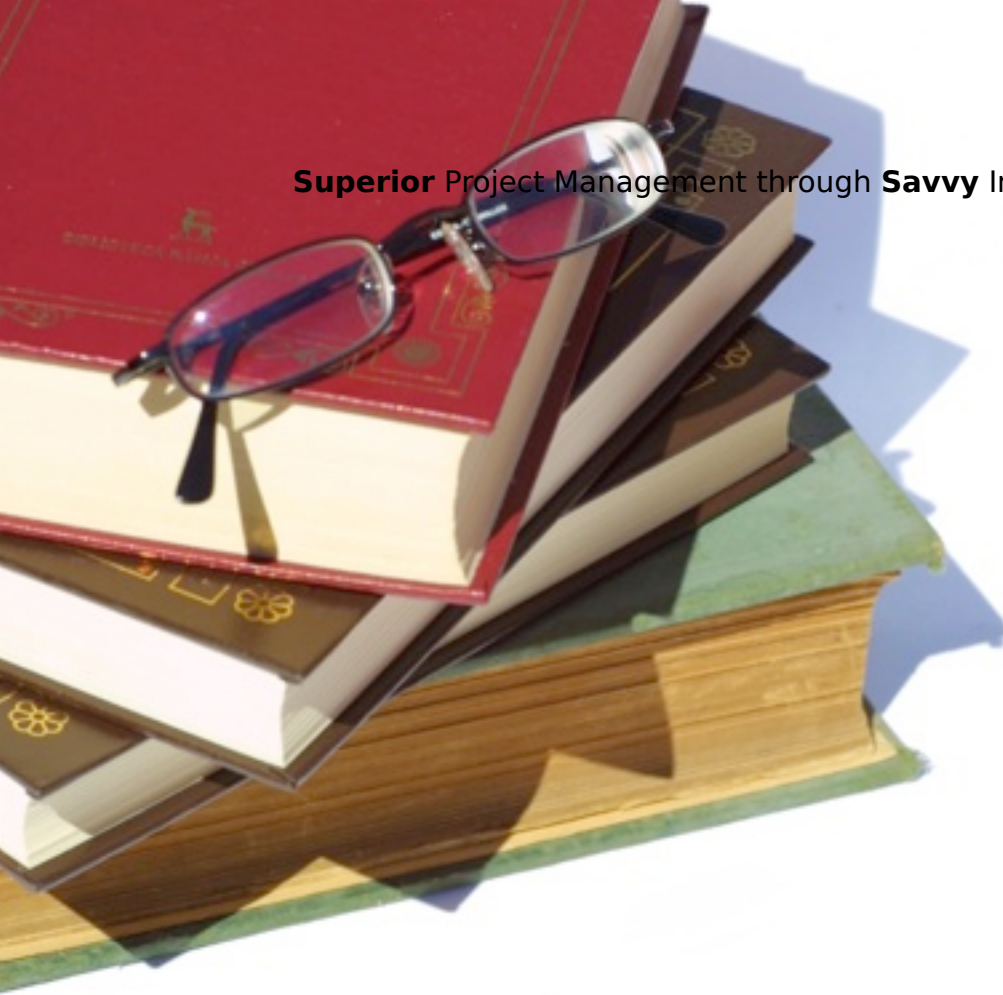
TRAINING + COACHING PROVIDES IMPACT AND CHANGE TODAY AND TOMORROW.

When you are stuck. When you've tried again and again to change your interpersonal communication habits and have failed. That is what coaching is about. It is through these past failures that we gain the savvy to push on to successful ventures.

Changing behavior requires time, focus, support, and practice. Executive coaching provides that.

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about Presentation YOU

Presentation**YOU**.com: Presentation Solutions
to get your **brilliance** out of your head and into the world.




PresentationYOU was created by Linda DeLuca over several years of curating treasures from masters and thought leaders, focusing on interpersonal communication, presentation, behavioral strengths, and behavioral change.

It includes a step-by-step repeatable approach to help you get your message out of your head and into the world.

Focusing on your intent, behavior, and impact - we identify your style and strengths to build your approach for savvy communication.

The presentationYOU system focuses on the conversation, the message, and the delivery. No matter if you are having a conversation across the table, in the boardroom, on the web, or delivering a keynote - the presentationYOU approach will help you deliver an effective, impactful, and memorable message.

Presentation**YOU** System

	Phases	Benchmark Capabilities	Results
	Preparation	Build the Case	Effective
	Develop / Design	Craft the Message	Impactful
	Deliver	Delivery with Authenticity	Memorable

From boardroom to webroom
the message begins with YOU.

Presentation**YOU**.com

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A Message from Linda DeLuca, Executive Coach

I understand those difficult situations, the restrictions, and the obstacles you face when trying to get something done, approved, or understood through communications formal and informal.

I've worked in global corporations, small businesses, and as an entrepreneur. With more than 25 years of business experience in a multitude of functions and industries, you could say I've studied at the school of life. I've learned the hard way that **communication skills are the keystone to the success of any professional**. I have experience with technology, process design, and human behavior. Of those, **humans are by far the most complex**.

Yep, I even have an Ivy League education from The Wharton School; earned my Green Belt in Process Design Excellence from Johnson & Johnson; and am a Professional Certified Coach (PCC) and member of the International Coach Federation (ICF).

I advocate **learning as a process** and only design, develop, and deliver engagements to support sustained positive change. I believe that change, even organizational change, happens one person at a time. And that is how I work: one person at a time.

I'll challenge you; question you; keep you focused; push you when you're uncomfortable. I'll also provide new perspectives; share observed patterns; and remind you of your strengths. I'll ask you to take responsibility for your choices and actions. When we talk, I'm 100% focused on you.

Work with me to develop those savvy communication skills and become a superior project manager. **Write me today** and get the advantage: Linda@presentationYOU.com

