

Anger Contributes to Project Success

By Naseem Mariam

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ABSTRACT: There are situations when negotiations and compromise are inappropriate attitudes for a manager. When team members flout discipline, honesty and other values that the company holds dear, then managers need to be strict, firm and know how to use anger in a constructive manner. Learn how with this case study of 3 managers and their response to such a situation.

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"I have learnt through bitter experience the one supreme lesson to conserve my anger, and as heat conserved is transmuted into energy, even so our anger controlled can be transmuted into a power which can move the world." ~ Gandhi

Mr. Xavier was holding forth in full force. Poor Ms. Tanya could not hide anywhere. She just wished the earth would open and swallow her up. Being scolded was justified since the project was in a real mess: but in this manner and that too in full view of the public. Xavier was usually unfeeling and uncaring and now his rage was making him say hurting things.

Tanya wished that she could be a little more assertive and not just stand like a dumb doll. She felt her mind go numb

with fear. She felt she should hide the shortcomings of the team and support them even though they had made many costly mistakes. She did not want to spoil the camaraderie and family feeling that existed in the team. She did not know how to get the project out of the mess and save the situation.

Just then Ms. Michelle walked in. Tanya heaved a big sigh of relief. Michelle would know how to handle this situation.

The first thing Michelle did was to agree with Xavier and scold the project team members and Tanya. She slowly and skillfully herded Xavier, Tanya and a few key project team members into the nearby conference room and closed the door. Everyone visibly relaxed, even Xavier. You could depend on Michelle to pour oil on troubled waters.

What Michelle did next surprised both Xavier and Tanya. Michelle spoke in such a cold, menacing voice that shivers ran down Tanya's spine. Michelle's voice was calm, quiet and dignified. It held so much suppressed, controlled anger that it had a greater effect on the team members than any of Xavier's uncontrolled passionate loud outbursts.

"Some behavior is totally unacceptable", Michelle was saying, "Integrity of character and honesty in your dealings with the rest of the team, with Tanya, Xavier and me is the minimum mandatory requirement. Without this the trust we have in the project team will get eroded. Once that happens all of you will have to face the consequences! It is not that you are not aware of where you went wrong, nor that you do not know how to correct the mistakes within a reasonable time frame. It is your marked careless attitude and arrogance that irks Xavier and me."

Xavier interrupted Michelle with a "Hope you can take care of this situation and bring it under control fast. I know I can rely on you" and left the conference room.

Michelle asked Tanya to outline the mistakes made and discussed with the team members what corrective actions would be taken, by whom and within what time frame. The project team saw that Michelle was serious and would take the drastic actions that she threatened them. It was difficult nowadays to get such a good development project: most projects in the company were in maintenance of customer's legacy code.

Each and every one of them now wanted to do a good, excellent job on this project. They all wanted to get Michelle back to her jolly, caring, sharing self and not this cold, stern M'am facing them at the moment. Michelle supported Tanya and the other team members throughout their

bad days. She was ever ready with a helping hand, giving valuable design comments and corrections on time. Xavier and the customer were constantly updated about the project progress.

Tanya was very happy to get Michelle's support and guidance. She tracked the Action Items to closure and the crisis was averted. The customer got a good quality product well within the deadline. Michelle was a hard taskmaster, stern and strict throughout this bad phase. She would laugh and joke as usual but when the project progress was discussed she was their worst critic. Her sharp eyes missed nothing. She demanded nothing less than excellence and superlative quality of the deliverables.

Tanya and the project team members found it hard to believe that they had averted the crisis -- in such an effective, effortless manner. They loved the hard work and coordinated effort that they had put in as a team. They admired Michelle for having given them this opportunity to excel themselves. They had experienced Synergy at work and loved every bit of their experience.

"He who rips his clothing or throws something in his anger, it is as if he worships idols." ~ Talmud

When projects are in a mess, Managers have three options:
(a) get violently angry & blame every one and anyone (Xavier)
(b) continue as if there is no problem (Tanya)
(c) apply strong arm tactics that solve the issue (Michelle)

Get violently angry like Xavier
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However these uncontrolled bursts of temper do not solve the situation. They cause a lot of heartache and unconstructive unpleasantness. Sincere team members often get fed up with managers who start screaming and screeching anytime and every time there is a problem.

They would rather leave the company than stay around and get insulted in front of their friends. This turnover of key team members then just adds insult to injury. The project mess becomes more difficult to clear up. The remaining team members just give up hope and do not put in their best efforts to rectify the situation and reclaim the project.

When we get angry, are we displaying strength or weakness? Sensitivity or ruthlessness? And when we deflect our anger, are we reacting maturely or out of cold-heartedness and indifference? The answer is crucial.

Though it may be ugly to see someone lose their temper, perhaps those of us who avoid getting angry are really

engaged in a subtle form of escapism. If I train myself to stay calm in the face of oppression, am I not stifling my own humanity?

How can I allow others to suffer without lifting a finger or one voice in their defense? How can I respect myself for long when I always allow myself to be brow-beaten by the team or my boss?

Take Tanya's case.

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She was not able to motivate her team out of the chaos. Lack of discipline in a few team members nearly ate up the hard work of the others. Tanya did not have the strength of character to take the tough path of confrontation and counseling. Thus small incidents were allowed to snowball into a near catastrophe.

"The world needs anger. The world often continues to allow evil because it isn't angry enough." ~ Bede Jarrett

As a manager it is your right to demand that the team members give their best effort towards the project work at hand. A good mix of carrot and stick is required to achieve efficient, effective and effortless project success.

Controlled anger when things go wrong -- especially when channelized through counseling and private conversations does help.

Take the case of a mother who never got angry with her child -- not even when the child robbed and cheated his neighbors. When the child grew up to be a dacoit and was to be hanged, he wished to have a last word with his mother. He then bit his mother's ear and cursed her for not having corrected him when he was young. "Spare the rod and spoil the child".

Similarly as a manager we are accountable to (a) the client for smooth execution of the project, (b) our company's management for the best utilization of resources (c) team members for creating excellent work products with good management and with minimum stress (d) ourselves for managing fun-filled, successful projects. We should not allow a few to damage the hard work and toil of many.

As much as Michelle wanted the respect and love of the team members, she cared for her responsibilities more. She knew she was accountable to 4 stakeholders in the project: client, company, team and her own self. Michelle was not willing to compromise on her duties and responsibilities. She was willing to be tough to achieve project success.

In the end the team members were grateful to Michelle for the great learning experience they had had together in all

the 4 areas of management: self-improvement, team building, internal/external customer relationships management and projects management. They learnt how to balance these 4 areas to achieve project success, earn reward, recognition and internal satisfaction for a job well done.

Related Reading

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1. For more case studies featuring Xavier, Tanya and Michelle read "Project Serenity - How to gain happiness and peace"
<http://www.pm4all.com/serenity.html>

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About the Author

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Naseem Mariam is the editor of "Management that Soars" Newsletter & author of "Project Serenity - How to gain happiness and peace" . Her writings draw life from her 18 years experience managing software projects. Let her guide you towards Faster All Round Success and a Stress Free, Joyous Life. Her free ebook and Newsletter tell You How. Subscribe with mail to projectdioxide@sendfree.com Visit her at <http://www.123projectmanagement.com>

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