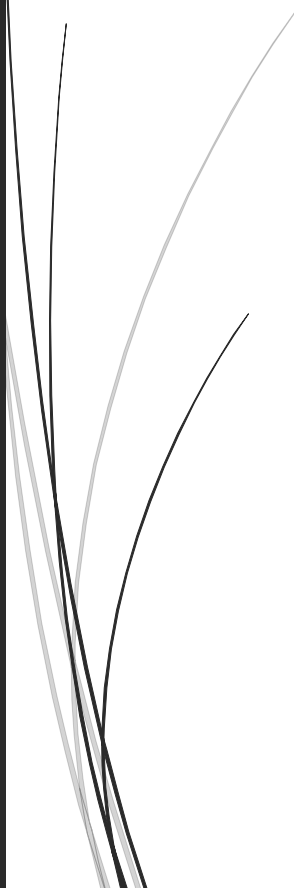




# Why Do Relationships Matter to Project Managers?

3 Elements to Integrate into Every Project Manager Toolkit

By: Sarah Dyson, Ph.D. & Joe Deklinski, DBA, MPA, EQI  
Harrisburg University of Science and Technology



Sarah Dyson, Ph.D. E: [Sdyson@Harrisburgu.Edu](mailto:Sdyson@Harrisburgu.Edu)  
Joe Deklinski, DBA, MPA, EQ I E: [Jdeklinski@Harrisburgu.Edu](mailto:Jdeklinski@Harrisburgu.Edu)

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## Abstract

Emotional intelligence is one of the essential attributes of success in the workplace and life. It is a skill that can be learned and developed. The ability to manage emotions is also a part of it. Emotional intelligence can be taught, practiced, and mastered by anyone who wants to become a better manager. It is not just about managing your emotions but being able to manage them effectively if you want to become a better leader. One of the hallmarks of effective project leadership is building constructive relationships. Relationship building is essential because project managers do not typically have authority over the team. If projects are to be successfully completed, the project manager must rely on working with others – this requires relationships. The more complex the project, the more people want your attention. It is impossible to do justice to them all, so it is time to prioritize the list to keep your most important working relationships manageable and growing.

*Keywords: Relationship building, trust, humility, empathy, project managers, leadership*

## Problem Statement

How can project managers use emotional intelligence to be successful leaders and deliver winning projects? Building relationships takes time, effort, and understanding of others- A big part is patience with yourself and others. Project managers understand that people drive the project delivery and perform the tasks necessary to make a project successful. Coordinating this work is very important to project success.

- *Who coordinates, cajoles, questions, and motivates the team?*
  - *The project manager!*
- *What is the common thread?*
  - *It's relationships!*

Emotional intelligence for leadership at any level involves being self-aware, disciplined, communicative, empathetic, humble, motivated, and passionate (Gleeson, 2018). Emotionally intelligent project managers use self-awareness to evaluate the situation, understand perspectives, listen without judgment, and keep from reacting to emotions. Muneer et al., (2022) indicated that emotionally intelligent project managers are about 11% more successful at managing processes, engaging stakeholders, avoiding scope creep, and efficiently using resources than project managers who lack these skills. Consider the words of Dale Carnegie, "When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but with creatures of emotion." How accurate is this statement when you consider managing projects?

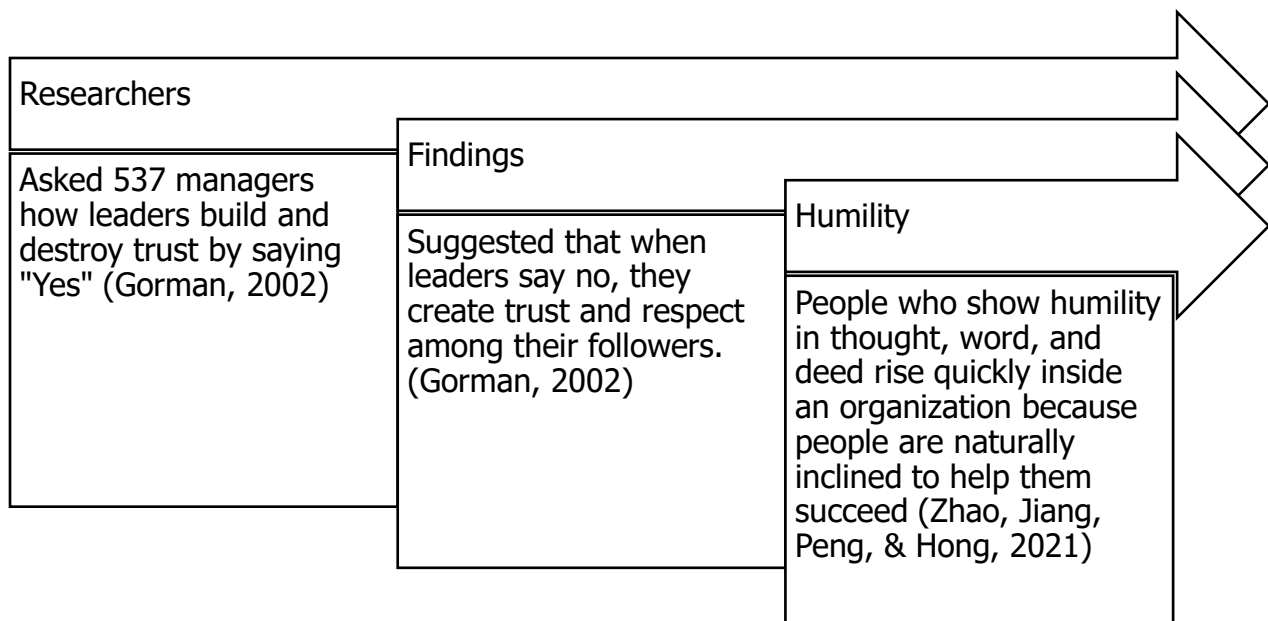
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*Let's face it. Project management is all about working with people. We sometimes should delve into numbers, but we deal with people. Bosses, clients, colleagues, team members, and stakeholders are the folks who make our projects succeed or fail.*

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## Integrate Tool-Kit

Trust, humility, and empathy are critical to establishing and cultivating relationships. Being self-aware, understanding how our emotions impact others, having humility and empathy, and developing excellent communication skills are imperative for driving a team to take collective action toward achieving common goals. These actions will lead people to behave similarly (Gleeson, 2018). Trust is one individual's belief or confidence in another individual reliability, integrity, and honesty. It is the expectation that the faith one places in someone else will be honored.



Humility is openness to others. It unfolds a pathway of service to others that is rooted in self-knowledge. You know there are obstacles more significant than you can overcome individually. Still, when you surrender a part of yourself to serving the team, you belong to a community that might surmount those obstacles (Negoro & Wibowo, 2021).

*Imagine if no one had empathy. How unpleasant would daily life be if no one cared about your perspectives and feelings? It would be miserable, and unfortunately, in some workplaces, that is precisely how it feels (Cook, 2020).*

### Build Reciprocal Relationships

An effective leader must juggle relationships, deciding which relationship to invest in, how much to invest, and when to invest (Goman, 2002). Extra time is required to invest in and build mutual trust with the new connections without casting aside existing ones. The best leaders can manage their relationships with others by being aware of their emotions. They can also recognize when a person feels low or needs help.

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The more trust that exists, the better your team will perform.

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Trust is a critical element in relationship building. Trust expands one's ability to establish mutually beneficial business relationships, which is more challenging than people believe. It is not only about whether you will trust someone any longer but also how you will add value to the relationship (Cook, 2020). Being open and honest with

your team members is essential when working with individuals from different backgrounds.

- *Project leaders can establish trust by actively listening, asking questions, and sharing information.*
- *When working with people from different project perspectives, listening and asking questions is essential.*

Building relationships requires listening to learn. Listening to learn means not inserting your opinion and not judging what the other person is saying while speaking. It also means not listening to plan your reply—forming your response before you really know the other person’s whole point. One habit to help engage in listening to learn is to ask yourself, *"Will I be more effective if I listen first?"* A project manager who listens well and acknowledges their team’s feelings improves communication and builds trust.

## Engaging In New Things

New things are challenging and exciting. However, you may not know what you are doing or how to do it. It is okay to feel you do not know everything. These experiences often lead you out of your comfort zone and allow you to learn from others. You may be surprised at how much you can learn quickly.

- *Embrace your curiosity.*
- *Curiosity is the eternal fire that fires in everyone’s mind.*
- *Curiosity is such a strong power.*

It makes us get out of bed in the morning and ponder what surprises life brings. Without curiosity, humanity would not be who we are today. Wonder is the feeling that drives individuals throughout their daily lives.

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*Humans have become adventurers and scientists with the essentials to take questions and question the world (Preston et al., 2015).*

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View new ideas without judgment. People with high levels of openness are interested in new things. These individuals are often motivated to learn about new ideas and gain new knowledge. Veshne and Mushi (2020) noted that remaining open to new experiences is correlated with intelligence, known as crystallized intelligence. Crystallized intelligence involves using all the facts and knowledge a person gains throughout life. When you can apply your experiences and information effectively, you become more confident in yourself and your abilities. In addition, being able to think critically and creatively helps you develop a sense of self-worth.

- *Try asking questions and seeking the advice of others.*
- *Talk to those around you to whom you rarely speak to seek new perspectives.*

How do assumptions ruin relationships?

When we make negative assumptions, we stop being open to others, stop trying to connect, even walk away from a relationship, or possibly quit our job, all based on our assumptions. It is difficult to change our beliefs and thoughts about the person involved. Assumptions are made based on the behavior of the people observed.



One's ignorance, narrow-mindedness, or individual experience with a particular person or type of person influences preconceived assumptions. We assign behaviors, characteristics, and physical attributes to others when we assume. These assumptions may be accurate or inaccurate. However, we must try not to think the worst of people during difficult times. It is essential to know how your assumptions affect other people and relationships.

Emotional intelligence allows you to see the impact of your actions, decisions, and emotions. Emotional intelligence will enable you to make better leadership choices (Panda & Banik, 2019). Rather than proposing rejection or blame, you can take responsibility for your behavior and use this knowledge to improve the situation.

## Overcoming Rejection

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*Colonel Sanders received 1,009 rejections for his chicken formula before hearing "yes."*

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How you overcome rejections in the present determines how you will deal with stressors in the future. We all have our own set of challenges and strengths. Preston et al. (2015) noted that individuals with high rejection sensitivity are so fearful and hostile to rejection that it affects their daily lives. Fear of rejection invokes avoidance of relationships with people and prevents us from achieving essential goals.

- *Consider exposing yourself to frequent rejections.*

- *Practice creating discomfort in everyday routines (e.g., spend one day without eating or walking to work instead of driving). Start gradually and incrementally add more constraints.*
- *Creativity also flexes your brain — instead of seeing problems as obstacles, your mind turns them into challenges.*
- *Humor can also play an important role — in finding new solutions, and your mind should relax first.*

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*"Playful humor enhances survival for many reasons (Anand, Walsh, & Moffett, 2019)."*

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## Conclusion

Most people are not born skilled project managers; project management skills are learned over time and through experience. Emotionally intelligent people know emotions can be powerful, but also temporary. Emotionally, intellectual leaders handle conflict better and play an essential role in conflict resolution. When a highly charged emotional event happens, such as becoming angry with a co-worker, the emotionally intelligent response would be to take some time before responding. Emotional intelligence can play a big part in how you manage your emotions. With emotional intelligence, project leaders can control their emotions, which prevents negative emotions from influencing their decision-making skills. As a result, they are less likely to make hasty decisions (Gleeson, 2018). Emotionally intelligent leaders are skilled at understanding emotions and care about the feelings of others. Relationship building takes time, practice, dedication, and a willingness to learn about yourself and others.

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