



## Case Study

### Supporting an Inexperienced Project Manager

**How do you support an inexperienced project manager in the early stages of a highly visible assignment through doubt and fear (when your background is not project management)?**

Fast paced change is everywhere these days. Often, untested but capable people are thrust into the limelight. They can succeed or fail. The latter is regrettable, preventable and can be recovered from, with great effort. The former is the desired outcome and lays the foundation for a career of great confidence and success!

Technology, competition, clients and a company's financial goals continue to demand change at a rapid pace. Successful change requires leaders with strong project management skills. Sometimes leaders with character, integrity, a good line management track record and recognized potential are asked to step into significant project management roles with little experience. These capable people have to grow into their new roles which can be especially challenging when their manager is himself not a project management professional.

In the late 90's, following a series of organizational changes, I was named senior general manager of a highly visible and sensitive treasury services function. At that time, the project manager responsible for converting the function's system to a new image based and Y2K compliant system was also transferred. Taking her place was Ryan, a young, energetic and high potential leader with no significant large project management experience in his background. Two factors compounded the challenge: 1) accelerating the transition and the project was a must since the year 2000 loomed and a 2 year project under another vendor had not succeeded and 2) my aforementioned lack of strong project management experience!

Soon after assuming responsibility for the project, Ryan began to show significant signs of worry, stress and fatigue. He confided in me that he was losing sleep, and that he was not sure he was right for the job. His overall appearance confirmed his lack of sleep.

I knew Ryan was capable of succeeding. Yet, this was by far the biggest challenge of his career. I listened carefully during this period of uncertainty demonstrating an understanding of his concerns. I shared with him similar experiences from my past, re-affirmed our confidence in him and my resolute commitment and that of others to his success. I encouraged him to connect with experienced senior project managers to learn about project management best practices. I also encouraged him to spend more time with technical members of the project team to gain a better understanding of systems. We agreed to meet regularly to review the progress of the project and assured him that I would be available for consultation and support all along the way.

Over time, Ryan's skills and confidence began to grow and the project's successes began to mount. Ultimately, the project was the anticipated success envisioned by all. This was in large part because of his personal growth and overall project leadership. Not too long afterwards, Ryan thanked me for my support and guidance and said that

he was confident that there would be no project in the future, no matter the size and scope that he did not think he could lead effectively because of this experience.

Ryan's prediction turned out to be absolutely true! He is currently a highly valued senior leader with a large national firm with significant project management responsibilities.

### **You might consider this check list if you are facing a similar situation:**

- Remind the project manager of your reason for selecting him/her for the role. Show understanding, encouragement and support.
- Create confidence that success will happen. Build the leader's confidence in his/her abilities to cope with problems and remind them of their previous accomplishments.
- Make yourself available. Know when and where you need to provide guidance. Offer ideas.
- Provide strong support for reasonable cost effective project management proposals.
- Encourage interaction with more seasoned project managers and with project team members, especially those representing unfamiliar disciplines.
- Ensure that project management methodology is being used appropriately across the board.
- Ensure the right project team organization structure, players and communications processes are in place.
- Participate regularly in project steering committee meetings.
- Drop in on project team meetings occasionally.
- Re-enforce learnings and reward and celebrate all achievements!
- Move him or her to the next challenge!

***Do you have a leader with strong character and line management experience in a key project management leadership role facing similar struggles? You can help your associate overcome his inexperience, doubt and fear and achieve great personal growth! Doing so will develop a loyal and committed long term leader with a broader set of skills as well as a very successful project!***

***If you would like a free Executive Management Assessment with me to discuss how I can help you achieve the greatest success possible, please call me or email me and we'll get clear about the best immediate next steps for the success of you and your team***

**Bob Reissiger**

**REISSIGER Coaching**  
**Bobr@coachingthecompellingway.com**  
**[www.coachingthecompellingway.com](http://www.coachingthecompellingway.com)**  
**770-279-9965**