

You are a Big “L”

Question:

Samoht, I am managing a project that has begun encountering many problems. When things were going well my team members were happy to follow me, but now that things are not going so well they are beginning to question my every decision! How can I regain control of my team?

Patsy

Answer:

Patsy

This is a great question, and in fact, I find myself in this situation quite often. Actually, only the second part, where my team members question my every decision. But I digress.

The only surefire way to get control of a team is to be a great leader! How do you become a great leader? By reminding people think you are a great leader, of course! Get out of the trenches! You are a project manager, and therefore better than a team member. It is important to set yourself apart by using the following techniques:

- **Keep your eyes on the big picture.** When things get tough, everybody's temptation is to become acutely focused on the problems, and, of course, to tell you about them. As a leader, you shouldn't focus on the problems – that is what the little people are for! Remind your team members that you, as the leader, are above the small problems. If there are problems, it is the team's responsibility to take care of them.
- **Keep positive.** Is your project about to fail? Probably! But don't tell your team members! A great leader always tells her team members that everything is fine. Never show any weakness. Eventually, your positive attitude will start to rub off on the team (you hope). If the project ends up failing the team will be disbanded you can always blame “politics”. This makes everyone feel good since it makes it appear that failure was outside of their control.
- **Be the last to sacrifice.** If you want to show your team that you are in charge, act like a leader! A leader would never get down in the trenches with her people. For example, did you ever see President Bush typing his own papers? Do you think Einstein had to clean his own erasers? Of course not. That is what the followers are for. If your team members need to work overtime, don't join them! If they need to take on additional responsibilities, you should give yourself fewer responsibilities. After all, how will they know that you are better than them if you act like one of them?
- **Remain calm.** Panic is for the little people. No matter how the constant questions by your team members may irritate you, never show it. They are just trying to get you to show weakness by caving to their demands or blowing up at them! If the barrage of questioning becomes too much, I have a little tip for how to keep your calm – just repeat everything that the team member speaking to you says. People hate this! Eventually, the person will become annoyed and go away. Calmness maintained!
- **Motivate.** Let your team members know that if they perform well, they can hope to one day they will be as powerful as you. Who wouldn't want that?

- **Create small wins.** Of course, I am talking about small wins for you. Did you arrive at work on time one day out of the week? Make sure everyone knows! Did you create some sort of report? Throw a party! Let everyone know how great you are, and force them to bask in your glory – after all, you are their leader!
- **Keep a sense of humor.** Laughing at the team members who are giving you problems will shame them into silence. Laughing at team member problems and errors also shows that you are a leader.

You can do a lot more than these examples. Remember, you are the leader. The team members are the followers. Don't let your team members forget it!