

24 APRIL 2009

 PRINT

Triple A

3 Intangible Skills that Make You Successful

By James T. Brown, PhD., P.E., PMP

Project management can be stressful because it requires a variety of intangible skills in addition to knowledge of project management principles. If your intangible skills are lacking or underdeveloped, your job can be overwhelming.

Intangible skills take you beyond adequate performance to excellent performance. If you were to list all of the intangible skills that benefit you as a project manager, the list would be so long it would seem to trivialize each skill.

However, three characteristics are essential for all project managers, and you can remember them as ***the Triple A: Anticipation, Action and Adaptation.***



Anticipation

Anticipation means **you are able to predict the likely outcomes of various decisions and actions.** You gain this ability by reading, understanding and correctly interpreting the people, data and circumstances surrounding a situation.

To succeed at anticipation, you must be trustworthy and have established, trusting relationships. These attributes are the basis of clear, honest communication that will enable you to interpret people and circumstances.

Wisdom with regard to emotional intelligence and human behavior is also required. **The committed project manager should be a lifelong student of human behavior** so you can better predict the actions and reactions of colleagues and team members.

Exceptional project managers use anticipation to quickly see to the heart of a matter and **avoid surprises.** Anticipation also allows for **more thorough and purposeful solutions,** because there is more lead-time to develop them.



Action

Action is the **ability to make things happen and inspire others to do the same.** Two key intangibles that support action are **passion** and **creativity.**

Passionate project managers get things done because of their strong belief in themselves, the project, the deliverable, and the organization or a combination of any of these. These beliefs are driving forces that stimulate action.

Creativity is required to find new ways to motivate people, accomplish tasks and remove obstacles that stand in the way of project objectives.

In a perfect world, the work identified in the Work Breakdown Structure would simply be assigned and executed by the team. In the real world, you must motivate people to execute the plan, and put them in a position where nothing prohibits or inhibits that execution.



Adaptation

Adaptation describes the **ability to respond positively to unfavorable decisions and unfortunate circumstances.**

You or a team member can make a mistake, a vendor can be late, or a consultant can work out poorly ... a seemingly endless list of bad things that can happen in a project.

But the exceptional project manager adapts in a positive manner to these situations and takes ownership of situations.

Through adaptation, **you learn from your mistakes and you have the confidence to continue to make aggressive decisions**. You recognize that a mistake just made was not your last, and a worse mistake would be passivity and failure to make timely decisions.

When it comes to fixing unfortunate circumstances, stay resolute and do not get discouraged.

The intangibles that support adaptation are **having a positive attitude and providing solutions for unfortunate circumstances, regardless of their origin**. You must always adapt your plan to deal with the circumstances of the project.

Project management may not be for everyone but for those of us who love it, the intangible attributes of **Anticipation, Action and Adaptation** will bring you to high levels of achievement.



Dr. James T. Brown is president of a project management training company, [SEBA Solutions Inc.](#), and of a Web-based provider of Professional Development Units (PDUs) for PMI credential holders, [OnePdu.com](#). He is a keynote speaker on project management topics and will provide a keynote address at the PMI 13th annual Information Systems SIG (ISSIG) Professional Development Symposium ([PDS](#)) '09 in Montréal, QC, Canada on 10–13 June 2009. Please send your questions or comments to [Dr. Brown](#).

© 2009 Project Management Institute, Inc. All rights reserved.
See the [Community Post home page](#) for information on PMI marks.

[HOME](#) [BACK TO TOP](#)