

Finding Your Voice: The Power of Speaking Up as a Project Manager

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In a recent PMG interview, industry thought leader Mike Clayton made a profound observation: many project failures stem from the inability of project managers to speak up when their projects veer off course.

The significance of this statement cannot be overstated. In an era where project complexity and stakes are constantly rising, project managers must become more willing and capable of “speaking truth to power.”

Why is Speaking Up So Important?

- **Preventing Project Failures:** By identifying and addressing issues early, project managers can prevent minor problems from escalating into major crises.
- **Building Trust:** Open and honest communication fosters trust with stakeholders, leading to better collaboration and support.
- **Demonstrating Leadership:** Speaking up demonstrates courage, integrity, and a commitment to project success.
- **Protecting Your Reputation:** Failing to address issues can damage your reputation and career prospects.
- **Interpret Early Warning Signs:** By recognising early signs of project deviation you can challenge the business case for continuing or implement the necessary interventions to ensure correction.

Tools and Techniques for Speaking Up Effectively

1. Develop Strong Communication Skills:

- **Active Listening:** Pay close attention to what others are saying, ask clarifying questions, and provide feedback.
- **Clear and Concise Communication:** Express your thoughts and ideas clearly and concisely, avoiding jargon and technical terms.
- **Nonverbal Communication:** Be mindful of your body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions.

1. Build Relationships:

- **Networking:** Connect with stakeholders at all levels of the organization.
- **Establish Rapport:** Develop positive relationships based on mutual respect and trust. Create a counsel of respected advocates.
- **Seek Mentorship:** Learn from experienced project managers who have mastered the art of speaking up.

1. Use Data to Support Your Claims:

- **Gather Evidence:** Collect data, metrics, and other evidence to support your arguments.
- **Present Your Findings Clearly:** Use visuals and other tools to make your data easy to understand.
- **Propose Solutions and Recommendations:** Be decisive in your advice and recommendations.

1. Choose Your Battles Wisely:

- **Prioritize Issues:** Focus on the most critical issues that could have a significant impact on the project.
- **Choose the Right Time and Place:** Consider the audience, context, and timing when deciding how to address a problem.

1. Practice Assertiveness:

- **Express Your Needs:** Clearly state your concerns and expectations.
- **Stand Up for Yourself:** Be confident and assertive without being aggressive.
- **Learn to Say No:** Don't be afraid to decline unreasonable requests.

1. Seek Support:

- **Lean on Your Team:** Collaborate with your team members to find solutions to challenges.
- **Involve Senior Management:** If necessary, escalate issues to senior management for support.

By developing strong communication skills, building relationships, using data effectively, choosing your battles wisely, practicing assertiveness, and seeking support, project managers can become more confident and effective advocates for their projects.

And by speaking up when necessary, project managers can help to prevent project failures, build trust with stakeholders, and demonstrate their leadership abilities.

Get more comfortable developing your voice, work on becoming more assertive and lean into your role as a communicator. As a project manager you play a pivotal role in ensuring project success.

By being willing to speak truth to power you not only define your own level professionalism and expertise; it's a responsibility that can make a significant difference success and failure of your project. So step up, raise your game and your voice.

You can read Mike Clayton's original interview here: [Link](#)