

**“Does Yer Dewg Bite?”**  
**Be it the customer or your manager, only if you let them**

By  
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For those of you who ever watched the Pink Panther movie series written and directed by Blake Edwards and starring Peter Sellers, by far one of the most famous movie scenes is in the movie The Pink Panther Strikes Again. The scene starts when Inspector Clouseau the bumbling main character of the movie goes up to an inn keeper and asks for a room. During the conversation with the inn keeper the inspector says the following:

Inspector Clouseau: "Does yer dewg (dog) bite?"

Inn Keeper: "No"

Inspector Clouseau: "Nice Doggy" (he bends down to pet a dachshund - it snarls and bites him.)

Inspector Clouseau: "I thought you said yer dewg did not bite!"

Inn Keeper: "Zat... iz (That is) not my dog!"

To this day when my wife Dawn and I want to laugh about a situation where we assumed one thing and it turned out to be something else we recite this scene to each other. If you look at the scene in the movie this could very well take place on any of your projects. If you analyze the scene Inspector Clouseau did what any reasonable person would ask when approaching an unknown pet, he asked a reasonable question but assumed the nearness of the individual accurately determined the ownership of the pet.

Mistaking ownership of a project can happen to any one of us while on a project. If you fail to ask the right questions as you determine your risk plan, if you fail to follow through with the series of right questions or you minimize the risk itself, you may unintentionally fail to capture the risk in its entirety and therefore it will come up to bite you somewhere in the project. Much like the situation that I described about a year ago when I published my second article for the PMFORUM titled: Maria and the ASP, you have to weigh those items that can impact your project and put a weighted measure against it to determine the likelihood of it ever occurring.

On a project it could start right off by assuming that you have the right or all the correct stakeholders who have the power to influence and provide input to the project along its various critical paths. This real scenario happened to a junior project manager who was placed under my fold to mentor and one of his first tasks was to identify all the stakeholders and have a completed Statement of Work (SOW) prepared to be approved by all the right individuals. For those of you who have had to experience this for the first time you know that this in itself

can be a daunting task. As the junior project manager was going about his tasks, identifying all the stakeholders, and reporting back to me with his progress I was getting this sick feeling in my stomach that all the stakeholders were not being identified. Do not ask me why, but I had this feeling several times throughout the sizing phase. This was a small project and I knew from the start it would not need as many stakeholders as some of the bigger projects but as the project unfolded and the project manager was updating me, the hairs on the back of my head kept sticking up. I can remember asking this junior project manager if he had all the right players which he acknowledged that he did. As he was going through the sizing initiative and reached the point when the stakeholder had to sign off, I received this frantic phone call from the project manager that the lone stakeholder would not sign off on the SOW. I proceeded to calm down the project manager and said, "These things happen", I asked him what points did the stakeholder disagree on and we will renegotiate. The project manager said the stakeholder did not disagree to any of these points. Being a bit puzzled I therefore asked the next question "Then what is the problem?" The project manager said the identified stakeholder told him that he did not have the authority to sign off on the project. Now let's go over the facts for a moment, this stakeholder was involved from the beginning with the requirements sessions, he involved himself in all the meetings, worked with us on all the SOW rewrites, so one would assume that this person had the power to sign off or at least acting for the person who does. As I said this was a small project, we were contracted consultants who did not fully understand the organization and all the politics and I was new to the account. I relied on this project manager who had been working on-site for a year and assumed he knew the lay of the land so these would be risks that should have been mitigated, etcetera. So, I called this stakeholder and asked what issues he had with the SOW and what do we need to do to get this project off the ground. The stakeholder replied to me that he could not sign off on this document because he did not have the authority. I responded: "Do you mean that your manager has to sign? No problem, then let us arrange a meeting with your manager and go over the details with him". The stakeholder replied, "No that is not the issue you really need to speak to another department, this project does not belong to me". At this point I was flabbergasted so I asked the next reasonable question: "Why would you sit with us over the various meetings, provide input and agree to everything without having the authority or more important the need for this project if it does not even deal with you?" With that he replied, "My group was being reorganized and I had nothing to do so I wanted to stay busy and participate in something until my next assignment took place".

The lessons learned from this situation were: One, find the right business owner; Two, always ensure in the risk identification section of my SOW, that all project stakeholders were identified with the authority to participate; and Three, anyone entering into the sizing phase with us acknowledges that we would be compensated for our time.

Well that is one way a customer and a team member can bite you and as you well know there are plenty of other ways but as I explained in my other articles we all have more than one level of customers that you have to deal with on a daily basis and your manager can be one of them. Unless you are on the top of the food chain, there are very few people who do not have a higher up to report to. Over the years I have had my fair share of very good managers, male and female as well as very bad managers more males than females and I thought it would be a good time to lump them into this conversation about customers biting you. Here are some characteristics that I feel make a quality manager. The following are not in any order:

Integrity, Humor, Street Smarts, Respect for the individual, Political without being a back stabber, Mentor, Cool under fire, Knows how to administer criticism without being cruel about it, Fair and Impartial, Likes oneself, General knowledge of the environment that they are working in, and Relationship Builder.

These are the big ones that come to mind that I would like to talk about. First and foremost we are all imperfect and all have bad days. But I think the real issue is there are so many bad managers that it has become an epidemic of sorts. I am not necessarily talking about project managers as I am about people who manage other people regardless of what they do. A person who wants to manage needs to have these traits in order to foster the team around them. Seems strange that with all the quality management gurus and books out there on how to manage we still do not seem to get this right. I do not claim to be the expert in the human psyche nor do I have plans to write a book about the subject (Although if some publishing house is reading this article and would like to contact me, my contact information is listed below!). Of all the truly great managers, I have had over the years these traits seemed to be held by all. Whether or not a higher percentage of one was needed over the other is hard to say but I think a lack of any of these would be a critical fault in ones overall personality.

The one question you might raise is if you do not have one of these traits can you develop it? To a large degree I would say yes, if you have the one trait that is by nature the most important virtue, integrity. Integrity comes in many forms but you know it when you see it and when it is not in a person's character it comes up and bites you very quickly. Unfortunately we are all seeing a lot less integrity these days in the way that government deals with its citizens, how corporations are treating their employees, and how we treat each other both in and out of the business world. Will things reverse themselves, will the pendulum swing to the other side, I do not know. Think of the things we have to do to get a successful project delivered: The SOW, the various other documents, and the constant

renegotiations that have to take place, it is a far cry from the days when all one had to do was to shake your hand and the deal was made.

I am also appalled how we treat each other at the office. We have all seen situations where back stabbing on projects took place or the defamation of one's character is spread around. The manager must have control of the environment and end the chaos the second it hits the surface. If not, it begins to fester like cancer and it permeates throughout the entire organization until the focus of the day is not about the work but the news at the water cooler. In fact I have seen more managers taken out of their position not from a lack of tech skills in the business area but more from a lack of people skills. When a manager cannot control the employee noise level, overtime this too will come to bite him.

I recall a situation when as a consultant I was asked to perform an audit on a department's quality program. During the initial kick-off phase as my team was introducing themselves, I was introduced as the one who would lead a certain portion of the review and I wanted to introduce myself to the individual representing the department for that piece of the project. Well this person must have been having a really bad hair day and proceeded to go off on me about how he thought this was ridiculous to do this quality review and he did not have time for this. I really mean that this guy went up one side of me and then the other. Remember all I did up to this point was to introduce myself and try to find a time on his schedule so that I could complete my tasks. Well I looked at this individual and without expressing any anger in my tone said. "I honestly do not know where I may have stepped on your toes, tongue or whatever else may be dangling off your body, but all I was trying to do was to introduce myself to you. We all have tight schedules we are working under but since this is a major corporate initiative and I am here to perform my job I will not take that last outburst personally. To show you that there are no hard feelings would you like me to be at your office at 8:00 am or 8:15 am and I take milk and sugar in my coffee". At that point four things got accomplished: I remained composed and professional; the department representative had been put in his place; I established the rules we were going to work under; and the project went on as planned. There is just no excuse to treat one person without the same respect that you would want for yourself. I am convinced that if you let it happen to you once it will repeat itself again and again.

It goes the same for a manager who feeds on fear and intimidation. I recall one in particular whose sole purpose was to cut headcount and all his mission was to make people quit which as you can imagine created fear and tensions within the organization. He tried to do this by making himself the alpha dog by introducing the "Ten Commandments" of his department. Knowing what his intent was when he showed up one day to introduce himself to me just to see me sweat. I had prepared for this meeting by doing the following: I raised the heat in the room so that his entire focus was not on the conversation but on the heat; I also lowered

his chair to make it so uncomfortable for him where he felt that he was much smaller than I was in my presence (I am a big guy as is at 6'1"); and I also made sure that I would invade his comfort zone (the space around each of us that we protect and allow certain people to enter). This manager's conversation was going to be all about creating dominance and power over one individual and I would not have any of that. Between the heat and the sweat rolling off his brow, the chair which made him feel much smaller in stature, and other things that were said I cannot tell you about, I threw his game off enough that he did not want to spend his time with me again in that environment. So much so, the end result was I had established the ground rules on how I was expected to be treated. I did not surrender my self respect.

There is no single reason I can think of to treat someone with disrespect. In my observations I discovered people who treat others with disrespect for some reason tend to not like themselves and have to take it out on someone else.

If I can pass and share anything on to any other project manager is you need to treat people with respect and encourage them along the way. Yes there are folks who should not be in the position they are in. Perhaps it was too much for them or it was just over their heads and you deal with that as a manager. In my years in the corporate world I have only met two to three folks who were just lazy and thought only about themselves and there are ways to deal with that type, even those folks need to be treated with respect.

As I have mentioned in my other articles the skilled work force is declining in the United States. There will have to be a fundamental change in the way corporations treat and hire the senior work force. I predict that companies in the next ten years will have to find more ways to retain workers than they are willing to admit. There will have to be a fundamental change in the way we view the senior work force.

Companies will have to do the following over the next ten to fifteen years. First, put richer incentives in place to keep the mass exodus of senior workers from leaving. Like most U.S. corporations they will wait until the last quarter to hold on to as much profits as possible. Second, they will have to invest much more in mentoring programs to ensure the knowledge base does not totally erode. Third, more and more companies will use project managers like the line managers of yesterday. In short they will not use matrix work teams rather the project manager will be assigned 10 individuals and he/she will be responsible for their work and also for the writing of the performance plans and education needs etc. In essence the project manager will hold on to their paper (a phrase used to describe that the manager had total responsibility for the employee). Fourth, a percentage of contract workers made of skilled senior professionals will swell up. This will occur not only in corporations, but the medical and education world as

well. Fifth, to minimize some of the corporate pain we will have to have some sort of national health plan and be taxed for it. I do not care what any politician says like it our not as Americans we subsidize large corporations through all the tax breaks that they get. In the end this will be just another one.

My final prediction is as the U.S. work force becomes more global, this will add to the decline of skilled professionals in the corporate, health, education, and other fields in our own country and we will have more outsourcing of our work. One day little Johnny will get up from his bed, go to his computer and will be taught advance math from a teacher located in China or India. It will be very possible for little Johnny to be diagnosed with the Flu from a doctor who is 2000 miles away or have his tooth filled by a robot controlled by some remote medical corporation who provides this service. I also see the further erosion of the unions and if they still exist will most likely remain with civil service organizations and perhaps small pockets of the manufacturing sector.

Therefore I think there will be more fundamental changes in the white collar project manager area. I have said to my friends over the years I have become in sorts a white collar plumber. What I mean by that is I have this bag of skills and over the years I will find myself in some combination of being self employed or employed by some corporation for a short period of time on a contract basis vs. full time employment.

Corporations that still have a 30-year "like" pension plan will in the very near future have such a brain drain, that they will be forced to offer richer compensation packages to retain their workers. As Al Pacino said in the Godfather III movie, "Every time I try to get out they pull me back in". If I was a VP in Human Resources for a major company and I planned to work there for the next ten years this would be on my top five list of worries. If one truism exists, life is a pendulum. It will swing from one side to another. I feel we are about to see a fundamental shift in the work force to compensate for the decrease in skilled labor over the next 10 plus years.

So Does Yer Dewg Bite? It most certainly will if you let it. The actions or steps that you take to run your project, to ensure risk management has been identified and contained, is within your power. The self esteem you have from within will present an image that your self respect cannot be played with. I was once told, you need to be putting your badge on the line each day to challenge yourself and those that are around you. When you do, your stakeholders, your team, and you will create a project that you can all be proud of.