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Churchill the Agile Project Manager  
Churchill Stiffens Resolve  
Part 15 in the Series

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**Parts 1 - 14 in this series available at:**

[http://www.peworldtoday.net/featured\\_papers/2007/oct.htm](http://www.peworldtoday.net/featured_papers/2007/oct.htm)

Most people are very familiar with Winston Churchill but may not be familiar with his “agile” approach to project management and his skills as a project manager (PM) in the summer of 1940. Part 14 looked at how Churchill personally communicated using both verbal and non-verbal communication to fight the mood of defeatism, build confidence, and get buy in into his plan. This article, with an invasion imminent, discusses how he stiffened resolve, took the offense with decisive action, and focused on the moral dimension of events. This was very pertinent to Churchill’s long term strategy.

In today’s world the PM is the principal representative of the project. In many projects after the euphoria of the kickoff meeting there comes a point where reality sets in, and so does the enormity of the task for the project team members. Confidence may start to wane and a wobble factor may creep in. The role of the PM is to act courageously to shift the mood and includes managing the projects emotional well-being.

One of Churchill’s long term objectives (Part 10) was to get the U.S. into an alliance with the U.K and eventually involved in the war. He sent telegrams to President Roosevelt asking for support, outlining the perilous situation . He also sent telegrams to Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King to enlist his support and impress Churchill’s case to Roosevelt. Churchill recognized the problem that Roosevelt (pictured below) had in supporting the U.K. publicly, with the U.S. staunchly neutral, although in private he encouraged Churchill.



**Churchill's ability to rouse the public spirit stiffened resolve.** His speeches were not just directed at the British public. He deliberately drew U.S. attention to the U.K.'s predicament showing the world that the U.K. was not defeated and ready and able for a fight. In London he courted U.S. journalists spending his precious time on lunches with them so they would support the U.K. morally and take a sympathetic stance.

At Oran Churchill took the most pivotal actions which did more than anything else in convincing world opinion that he was serious about the war. On July 3<sup>rd</sup> the French Admiral Gensoul was offered choices to ensure his fleet with its four capital ships stayed out of Axis hands. All were turned down and the Royal Navy opened fire on the anchored ships. Three ships were badly damaged and one blew up. For the Royal Navy in British eyes an unhappy but necessary duty had been carried out against their former French allies. French anger and bitterness was understandably considerable, "*a hateful decision but no act more necessary...*" The event showed Churchill's ruthless determination to cause. It also impressed Roosevelt that Churchill was a man of action and not bluster.



Churchill inspired a resolve in the public to continue with his unending hatred, and stubborn will to defeat the Axis no matter the cost. With defeat as a strong possibility Churchill's greatest achievement was that he refused to capitulate and he remained a strong opponent of any negotiations with the Axis. In the Cabinet few others had this degree of resolve. He also used his speeches to manage public expectations, not only preparing for the worst but to get "buy-in" for his strategy. For example, Dunkirk the disaster was turned into a victory.

In today's world, to stiffen resolve, strong decisive action is required by the PM to get buy-in for the long term.

**Churchill with decisive action proactively took the offense.** In June 1940 he pointed out that in the defensive state of mind created by the Dunkirk evacuation (Part 9), and by the possibility of an invasion, the country (public) might suffer from *“the mental and moral prostration to the will and initiative of the enemy which had ruined the French.”* He recommended *“Attack when possible”* philosophy, that is, repeated small-scale inroads on the Continent. He called for the organization of Commandos to raid enemy and occupied lands. In the Middle East the order was but to drive the Axis forces out of East and North Africa and not to sit tight in Egypt.

With the continent of Europe occupied, all hopes of decisive operations by land were abandoned. For Churchill and his advisers, the time of preparations was to be given over to a long-range attack against the Axis power. The only means of attack was indirect through air bombardment, blockade, and with organized risings in the occupied territories. In the words of the Chiefs of Staff, immediate action should be to *“destroy all upon which the Axis war machine rests—the economy which feeds it, the civilian morale which sustains it, the supplies which nourish it and hopes of victory which give it courage.”*

Churchill was surprisingly willing to sacrifice any national custom social convention, military etiquette or tradition for victory. To Churchill nothing was sacred and everything was open game. Parliament passed legislation placing all "persons, their services and their property at the disposal of the Crown." This granted the government the most sweeping emergency powers in modern British history.

**Churchill described the moral dimension of events.** Churchill stated that *“war is terrible but slavery is worse.”* He talked about the tyranny of the Nazi regime openly and threatening all that is sacred to man. He targeted his speeches at the nations of Europe, under Nazi occupation, to inspire hope, *“But if we fail, then the whole world --- Will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science.”* He even wrote to Stalin on June 25<sup>th</sup> outlining the dangers of a Nazi dominated Europe.

## Conclusion

Churchill's greatest personal achievement was resolve to the cause and projecting confidence, at a point when many people were ready to give up. He did this not just through his speeches but his actions. In other words he acted courageously to shift the mood.



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**Mark Kozak-Holland**'s latest book in the Lessons-From-History series is titled "*Project Lessons from the Great Escape (Luft III)*" <http://www.mmpubs.com/books-LFH.html>. It draws parallels from this event in World War II to today's business challenges. His previous books include "*Churchill's Adaptive Enterprise: Lessons for Business Today*", "*Titanic Lessons for IT Projects*", and "*Avoiding Titanic Disasters: Project Lessons for IT Executives*". Mark is a Senior Business Architect with HP Services and regularly writes and speaks (presentations and workshops) on the subject of emerging technologies and lessons that can be learned from historical projects. He can be contacted via his Web site at [www.lessons-from-history.com](http://www.lessons-from-history.com) or via email to [mark.kozak-holl@sympatico.ca](mailto:mark.kozak-holl@sympatico.ca). For more information on the Great Escape Memorial Foundation see [www.thegreatescapememorialproject.com](http://www.thegreatescapememorialproject.com)