Be a Project
MOTIVATOR

Unlock the Secrets of Strengths-Based
Project Management

Ruth Pearce, PMP, JD

Praise for *Be a Project Motivator*

"Ruth is among the best project managers I've had the privilege of working with in my twenty-five years in business. She is able to take a seed, a mere idea, and cultivate it into a fully flourishing plant, a successful project. And all this with generosity, humor, and sensitivity."

—Tal Ben-Shahar, bestselling author of *Happier* and founder of the Happiness Studies Academy

"In her book, *Be a Project Motivator*, Ruth Pearce has created a toolbox that should be on every businessperson's and entrepreneur's shelf. Throughout the book, Pearce integrates the most important rule of cultural awareness—the platinum rule of mutual respect. With this book on your desk or in your bag, we can have a little bit of Ruth Pearce and her fabulous coaching and persistent positive guidance with us whenever we need her!"

—Gwendolyn VanSant, CEO and Founding Director, BRIDGE, and Equity and Inclusion Team Lead, Imagine Philanthropy

"Ruth Pearce has written one of the must-read primers for project managers that will soon become an industry staple. She provides you with her lessons learned from thirty years of project management work on high-profile and complex projects."

—John Garahan, Vice President, Global Delivery, Broadridge Financial Solutions

"Enliven and optimize your project management! Read this book to get Ruth Pearce's special magic dust culled from her deep experience mixed with the newest scientific discoveries on human motivation and engagement."

—Neal H. Mayerson, PhD, founder and Chairman, VIA Institute on Character

"The age-old dilemma of responsibility without authority makes it a challenge for project managers to effectively engage and motivate people. The insights in the book are ideal for those wanting to capitalize on their strengths while being aware of and improving their areas for development. If you are serious about your impact and success as a project manager, this is a must-read."

—Cathy Liska, CEO, Center for Coaching Certification

"Ruth's extensive research from the fields of positive psychology and neuroscience are easily woven into a classic workplace example that we can relate to and learn from. The "Making It Stick" and "Strategies for Success" sections in each chapter are helpful and a great review. The timetable at the end of the book is an excellent tool to get started in developing one's skills as a successful and sought-after project manager so that you 'can pull greatness from your team.'"

—Patrice Palmer, MEd, MA, CPP, owner of Happiness @ Work

"Having walked the path of global project team management, I can say that this guidebook would have helped me be more effective and enjoyable—this is a must-read for anyone in a similar role."

—Gary Keil, PhD, RPh, cofounder of Growth Leaders Network

"I saw myself in Ruth's examples repeatedly. This book is so very relatable to the teams I work with every day! This book puts a new spin on antiquated ways of thinking. It provides great tips that are practical and can be implemented right away."

—Chorobis Drakes, PMP, member of Southern New England Chapter, Project Management Institute

"Ruth's book, *Be a Project Motivator*, chronicles how to engage project team members and stakeholders. The PM transforms her 100-strong team from being tired and dispirited to being motivated, engaged, and committed to succeed! Any PM will enjoy reading the book and also benefit from reading it."

—Peter Lyons, CORE02 Technical Product Manager, UniCredit Services

"Ruth Pearce's book is an excellent, well-researched tool kit for successful project management. Leveraging your character strengths to turn potential team collisions into collaborations—this book is a must-read!"

—Fatima Doman, bestselling author of *Authentic Strengths* and *True You! Authentic Strengths for Kids*

"Ruth Pearce takes the best and most pertinent research findings from positive psychology and weaves real-life stories into applied lessons that everyone can learn and benefit from. Her passion for connecting people with systems that change and enhance their lives sparkles on every page and makes this a must-have read for anyone who wants to be masterful in project and people management."

—Caroline Adams Miller, MAPP, bestselling author of *Creating Your Best Life*, *Getting Grit*, and *My Name Is Caroline*

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Be a Project Motivator

To Project Managers—
the Carriers of the Project Flame

It will take the linking of arms of kindred spirits into an
endless chain of advocates in order to tilt humanity
towards its better nature.
—Neal Mayerson, chairman, VIA Institute on Character

And to my US family, Gareth, Ben, Beckie,
Aavia, and Desi: you are my guiding lights.

And to my UK family, Jo, Peter, John, Susannah, and Esmé:
the best of Mum and Dad lives on in you.

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Foreword

More than ever before, project managers rely on the goodwill of others to achieve project success. As project managers, we leverage intangibles like influence, empathy, creativity, and leadership in our quest to enlist stakeholders to help solve real-world problems. We use these intangibles not as optional or nice-to-have features but rather as the essential working capital that we bargain with to get things done.

Over my twenty-year career as a project manager, entrepreneur, and business leader, I have worked with teams around the world to launch new products and deliver complex project outcomes. I have used a variety of approaches to project management—from the most arduous waterfall- and template-laden methodologies to fast-moving, agile, and scrum approaches. More often, I've employed composite approaches—waterfall planning coupled with agile elements for certain work tracks. Looking back, I can see now that these approaches are all simply tools that should be selected and used wisely. But how do we make the right choices for tools when we don't have the right team to use the tools?

As any good carpenter will tell you, the best tools do not build the house. If we gave the world's finest hammers, levels, and saws to an inexperienced and unmotivated team, a poorly built house would be likely to follow. And the inverse is true also—a highly motivated team with poor tools will find a way to deliver a quality product no matter what. Isn't the latter scenario the usual case for projects—a solid team with inadequate resources? Therefore, we must look to our team always, and invest in them, because a well-fortified team does not require one approach or another to succeed—they simply need the right environment to do their best work.

Case in point: The first time I saw Ruth Pearce in action as a project manager was in 2012 on an enterprise-scale business process reengineering project for a government entity. This project was large and unwieldy in every sense—from the constituent groups, which had diametrically opposed viewpoints, to the internal politics that covered the project team like a wet blanket. Hard as we worked, there was this ever-churning bureaucratic machine that could only go so fast and never stopped. This scenario is quite commonplace in large, complex projects, and Ruth was up to the challenge.

It was in this austere setting that I witnessed the magic of strengths-based project management from Ruth. Without any real pronouncements, she went about her work as project manager, gathering stakeholders to create effective coalitions around the various objectives and deliverables that needed to be built. She sought out the best in her team by asking, cajoling, convincing, influencing, empowering, celebrating, and giving the team the gift of her rigor. We all felt that we were in the service of something greater, despite the daily grind.

I see now that Ruth was using strengths-based project management to build a better team so that we could overcome the challenges of that environment. I've since come to understand that

this approach is needed in every project environment—from start-up product development efforts to large-scale complex projects. Since that time, I have come to believe that the only path forward is to engage our teams from their individual strengths. We must become project motivators, or risk project failure.

This book is for anyone looking for a better way to engage teams in project work. So much depends on getting the right people on the bus and building a team container that is strong yet flexible. Strengths-based project management is the pathway to a focused, resilient team.

Ruth is an engaging writer and fun storyteller. She brings a fresh viewpoint to the topic of team development and illustrates how project teams can operate from a strengths-based foundation. As someone seasoned in the use of the VIA character strengths assessment, Ruth delivers the VIA framework in an easy-to-understand way. This is a deeply insightful and rigorously tested assessment that every project manager and team member should take.

This book delivers a practical approach to inculcating positive psychology into the project environment. The book deals with real-world scenarios in which an understanding of strengths can help a team and explores how to use those strengths optimally. This book is really an investment in better projects and better teams. After all, project success demands that we all become project motivators.

Tim Jaques
June 2018
Saratoga Springs, NY

Introduction:
An Accidental
Project Manager

I never imagined myself growing up to be a project manager. When you think back to friends talking in school about what they dreamed of being when they grew up, do you remember anyone saying, "I want to be a project manager"? Probably not. Pilot, astronaut, doctor, nurse, or teacher, yes. Project manager? No!

When we are young, we don't understand that to get things done, someone needs to coordinate the effort. Our first experience of a project manager is probably one of our parents. One or both take on the task of juggling the demands of school, work, extracurricular activities, shopping, doctors' and dentists' appointments, vacations, and so on. But we don't really recognize the effort—and skill—that goes into that parental juggling until we are doing it ourselves.

I stumbled into project management quite by accident when the project manager on my project had to go home unexpectedly while we were on an overseas assignment. Rather than bringing someone new to the team, the company asked me to leverage my familiarity and established relationship with the client, my

knowledge of the project, and my general ability to organize things—which might be recognized as prudence in the language of character strengths—to be the project manager.

I loved it! As a project manager, I felt that I had a better handle on all the components of the project—not just my little corner of it—I had more opportunity to interact with a variety of people on the project, and I loved being able to facilitate getting things done. I was hooked, and for the next twenty years I went from project to project. Working in investment banks, software houses, nonprofits, state government, education, and insurance and retirement services, I had found my niche. I am a project manager in mind and spirit.

What Is a Project Manager?

When I told a friend of mine—who I thought knew what I do—that I was writing a book for project managers who want to become project motivators, she asked, "What is a project manager?"

For a moment I was at a loss as to how to answer. I had been ready with an explanation of motivation and its importance. I had my justification ready for why project managers want to be project motivators. But first, I had to go back to square one and answer the questions, "What are you? What do you do?"

My first thought was to reach for the Project Management Institute (PMI) definition: "the person assigned by the performing organization to lead the team that is responsible for achieving the project objectives."[1] A Google search produced this definition on Wikipedia: "Project managers have the responsibility of the planning, procurement and execution of a project, in any undertaking

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1. Project Management Institute, *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide)* (Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, 2017), 716.

that has a defined scope, defined start and a defined finish; regardless of industry."[2] While not inaccurate, this does not come close to highlighting all the facets of being a project manager.

As project managers know, the role is complicated and is becoming more so. If you are not convinced, write down all that a project manager does—it can seem quite overwhelming.

To start with, a project manager has the responsibility of building and maintaining a plan that is achievable and delivers the desired goal. To accomplish that, a project manager organizes the team and stakeholders to meet the project objectives. More than that, a project manager interfaces with various stakeholder groups and the main point of contact on a project. It does not stop there, because a project manager is the main communicator on a project. Some say that the best project managers spend more than 90 percent of their time communicating.[3] They represent the customer to the project team and the project team to the customer; they represent the project to senior management and management to the team; they represent their employer or client to vendors and vendors to their employer or client. A project manager is the intermediary between every stakeholder group and all the other stakeholder groups.

For those who like imagery, a project manager is the spider at the center of a delicate web. He or she provides the glue that keeps the project together and the momentum to keep it moving forward. As a colleague of mine described us, project managers are the "keepers of the project flame."

To achieve all of this, we need to be engaged and motivated, and we need to engage and motivate others. Without personal engagement and motivation, this role is overwhelming and

2. Wikipedia, s.v. "Project Manager," last modified May 10, 2018, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_manager.

3. Andy Crowe, *Alpha Project Managers: What the Top 2% Know That Everyone Else Does Not* (Kennesaw, GA: Velociteach, 2016), 83.

objectionable. Without the ability to engage and motivate others, we cannot focus on getting things done because we are forever stuck herding unwilling cats in a direction they don't want to go.

I believe that having the skills to engage ourselves and others is not just a nice added value but also essential for us to be effective and to enjoy our role. Being *project motivators* elevates us within the organizations for which we work, and it elevates the organizations themselves.

How Engagement and Motivation Make Things Happen

"OK," my friend said. "I think I get it now, but what do you mean by motivation?"

Throughout this book, I talk about engagement and motivation. Motivation is the impetus, drive, energy, and enthusiasm that causes someone to take action. Engagement creates that impetus by connecting the individual to the overall goals, helping him or her to feel important to the success of the goals and that the goals themselves have merit. It is the way to hold people's attention and keep them engrossed in the task. As project managers, we want to be project motivators. We want to provide the impetus and the incentive for our team members to take action and make things happen. There is lots of research that shows that lasting motivation does not come from the outside—so how does a project manager become a project motivator? The answer is by building engagement: by focusing on individuals, understanding and appreciating *their* motivation, and stimulating those intrinsic motivators that we each have.

We bring forth the motivation from within. Engaged people are motivated people. Motivated people are energized people. Energized people make things happen.

What Is Strengths-Based Project Management?

After my friend confirmed she had a better understanding of project managers and she felt comfortable with the explanations of motivation and engagement, she asked, "So, what is strengths-based project management?" I was really excited by that question because at the heart of this book is the topic of character strengths and how they help us to see possibility. But before we dive into character strengths, there are some guiding principles that will help us on our way. Most important is the power of influence, the ways in which we can engage our teams through our actions, our behavior, our language, and our attitudes. Two ways we can exert influence and achieve the greatest benefit are by modeling a growth or learning mind-set—something that, as you will see later, we are well equipped to do using our high hope and love of learning—and by building appreciation. And this is where the concept of character strengths comes in. Originally conceived, researched, and developed by Martin Seligman and Christopher Peterson, the concept of character strengths helps us to recognize, appreciate, and cultivate the things that are best in ourselves and others. Focusing on these twenty-four strengths in the teams I have worked with has transformed relationships, increased innovation, and changed culture. Seeing strengths and leveraging them has built engagement and created sustainable, energizing motivation.

Most of us—after all, it *is* human nature—spend a disproportionate amount of time worrying about and trying to capture and reverse negatives rather than identifying and capitalizing on positives. This evolutionary style, known as negativity bias, is natural and sometimes hard to resist, and yet research shows that focusing on negatives narrows our gaze and our thinking, and that focusing on positives makes us more creative, more open to