

The most successful project managers understand people not only as team members but as individuals.

These project managers have learned not only that the whole of a team is greater than the sum of its individual parts . . .

for guiding the team through the process. A project manager's success can be measured by whether the client is happy at the end of the project, whether the design team feels professionally fulfilled by the process and the project, and whether the project is a financial success for both the client and the design firm.

A Happy Client

A happy client is the best client. Every client deserves to feel good at the completion of his or her project. The design firm typically benefits too, from a satisfied client, either through additional work and a long relationship with the client, or via reference, with new clients. The project manager is the primary client contact and has the major responsibility for keeping the client happy. Successful project managers understand that happy clients believe that the project manager listens well, communicates clearly and regularly, and works to satisfy or exceed clients' expectations for the project.

A happy client believes that he or she is being heard. The project manager fosters this belief first and foremost with good listening and communication skills. It is imperative that the design firm, led by the project manager, hears and understands what the client is saying. The project manager must ask questions so that the design firm can understand the real concerns and issues being expressed by the client. The best way to do this is to develop good communication with the client. Good communication includes understanding the client's communication style, frequent communication, and the use of tools for documenting all communication. A happy client typically believes that he or she is being heard and directing the work of the design team.

In addition, a happy client feels that the project process, which may be unfamiliar, at least at the start of the project, is comprehensible and does not add additional stress to his or her life. Frequently, the client representative has been asked to take on the responsibility for the project in addition to normal job responsibilities. Whether the project is an additional task or the main job responsibility for the individual, projects are fraught with stress—deadlines, decisions, construction problems, etc. The project process should not in itself create additional stress. If the client can count on the project manager to lead him clearly and calmly through the myriad of decisions, issues, and problems, the client will indeed be a happy client.