tion skills. It also takes understanding that it is necessary to modify project management style with every client. The project manager should make every effort to understand how the client likes to receive information, how decisions are made, the client's communication style, management style, time availability, and the level of formality the client wants to maintain in its relationship with the design firm. With this knowledge, the project manager can tailor the way the project is managed to the client.

It is also an important part of maintaining client relations to make sure the client understands his obligations in the development of the project. The client will be responsible for providing information, for arranging access to existing facilities, for setting up meetings, for making decisions, etc. The project manager can help the client fulfill these obligations by advising the client as early as possible of upcoming tasks or decisions. It is important to give clients time frames for all activities or decisions which require their time and/or coordination with other members of the client organization. Clients who have never participated in design projects are usually grateful to the project manager who guides them through the process. All clients like to feel that they are being treated respectfully and that the project manager recognizes the value of their time.

It is important for the project manager to be forthright in discussing problems with clients. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that everything will go smoothly on a project and that there will be no rough bumps along the way. Since people create projects, and people are not perfect, mistakes, misunderstandings, communication problems, documentation problems, and other challanges will be generated by the team doing the work. Clients should feel comfortable raising concerns about the project, the work, or the team with the project manager. These conversations should be handled in as professional and calm a way as possible. Clients should always feel that the project manager will be there to support them—in the good times and the rough times.

Lead the Project

Even though the project manager position includes plenty of behind-the-scenes responsibilities, the role is not a passive, behind-the-scenes role. The project manager must actively lead the project. He or she is the orchestra leader, the captain of the ship, the coach, the mentor, the negotiator, the moderator, the voice of reason, and the figure of authority.

Controlling the team's work and leading the team are two very different approaches. Certainly, in order to be successful in this role, the project manager must be knowledgeable about every aspect of the project and how the parts come together. The project manager must continually monitor the work. The team looks to the project manager to guide them. This does not mean, however, that the project manager does all of the work or makes every decision. It is the project manager's responsibility to support the team in the delivery of their work within the infrastructure, which he or she has established.

The client, too, looks to the project manager to be knowledgeable about every component of the project and also to delegate authority properly. To meet this expectation, the project manager must actively lead project meetings and communication with the client. Because client organizations are not dissimilar in structure to that of the design firm, most clients also expect the project manager to lead rather than do the work of the project team. Clients are astute in this area. They want to do business with leaders.

Manage Change

Change has become the norm during the delivery of nearly every design project. Even though project schedules are shorter than in the past, client organizations and businesses continue to change so fast that it is rare to complete a project without experiencing a change to the work. Change can occur at any point in the design process and frequently even during construction. The project manager must monitor requests for change and establish a dialogue with the client about how such changes may affect design fees.

Clients expect to pay for changes. The project manager must address the changes with the client as soon as they are known and work with the client to develop an agreement on how the cost of the changes will be addressed. It is almost impossible for everyone—the client and the design firm—to accurately and fairly address changes at the end of a project. No one will remember the details, and it will be difficult to reach agreement on costs. The design firm may not be able to recoup the cost of work already delivered. Clients may refuse to pay because they don't remember the details or because their resources have been expended. They may feel pressured to pay for work they no longer understand the depth and impact of. Not only may the design firm realize a financial loss on the work, but also a good client/design firm relationship may be affected.