

Writing the Book on Getting SMART

Developing Leadership Skills

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“Continued learning is a key to effective leadership because no one can know everything there is to know.”

—Mike Krzyzewski
Leading with the Heart

So, you’ve really made the BIG time. You are on **the list** as a project/product manager. What an achievement! What success! A dream come true. Wow!

You’ve enjoyed the celebratory dinner and e-mailed all your professional associates with the good news. You’ve attained all your certifications (or will get them en route to the new PM job), and you’ve even “penciled in” a Change of Command date on the calendar. Now what do you do?

“It Depends”

What did they teach you at the Defense Acquisition University/Defense Systems Management College (DAU-DSMC)? The answer, as you may recall, is invariably, “it depends!”—right? Now that you’ve been selected as a PM, the primary “it depends” for what you do next is based on *when* you’re taking the position.

If it’s within a few weeks, then that presents one set of circumstances. However, if it’s within six months and you are going to the Advanced Program

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**TO LEAD FROM THEIR
STRENGTHS, LEADERS MUST
KNOW THEIR STRENGTHS.**

Management Course (APMC) en route, that presents a completely different set of circumstances. Having time allows for more preparation. But a key question still remains: What do you do to prepare to be the best PM you can be?

While one aspect of preparation for becoming a PM is certification in one of the 12 acquisition career fields covered by the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act legislation, another is taking time to get to know as much about your unique program as possible. However, acquiring all the certifications

and knowing the program are necessary—but not enough. To manage and lead a program/project with a high level of excellence, individuals need to know themselves.

“Know Thyself”

But how does one, as the ancient philosophers might have phrased it, “Know Thyself”? And doesn’t this get uncomfortably close to “staring at your navel,” “touchy feely,” “in pursuit of self”-type personal reflection? What does it really mean to “Know Thyself”? Does this mean knowing your Myers-Briggs pref-

erence? Does it mean understanding the feedback from PROFILOR, the 360-degree feedback instrument used at APMC? What does it mean? This article describes the SMARTbook, an APMC elective that helps individuals write their own book on being SMART—about themselves.

Individual Leadership Project

For many years, the Individual Leadership Project (ILP) has remained an important element of the Program Management and Leadership (PML) curricula, and before that, the Managerial Development (MD) curricula at DSMC. Historically, many of the students in APMC are en route to a project or program office as the program or project manager. These students were always extremely receptive to learning all aspects of program management because of their pending assignment, i.e., the project was real and imminent, thus instilling a sense of urgency.

Many students used the ILP as an opportunity to prepare for their new role. However, each person was unique, and each program management office was unique. Given these constraints, the students and respective faculty members would work jointly within the bounds of the curriculum requirements to tailor and customize the project.

In the summer of 1997, [then] Navy Cmdr. Walt Pullar was preparing to take formal command of a Contracting Command the week after graduation. Pullar used the project to help plan and prepare. He designed his project to include the formal presentation that would be made at his Change of Command. He also developed his philosophy of leadership or what is generally referred to as the “commander’s intent,” which includes his values, his goals, and the action items for getting started. Once he completed the academic requirements of his ILP, the *real* learning started.

After his final ILP paper was returned with his grade, and prior to the end of APMC, he had a completed standard Command Briefing, a Change of Command speech, a “to do” list for Week No.

1, a “to do” list for the first six weeks, and other goals for his assignment as PM. While working with the PML instructor, the student was able to “jump start” an otherwise stressful event. He reported to his command SMART.

The student’s work with this project was an incentive for instructors to share their positive experience with other students. Sharing with many students and other instructors encouraged more students to do similar projects, each tailored to the particular needs of the person and the program.

In 1998, a Navy commander arrived at APMC and heard the same spiel about the ILP. “Oh, great! Another paper for the instructor,” he later told us. At this point, the student viewed the project as a “to do” for the instructor and an academic exercise that needed to be checked off the “deliverables list.”

As he heard more options and learned about the possibilities the project offered in preparing him for a command assignment, he became more engaged. And as he began to think more about it, options grew increasingly clearer. One day, in a blinding flash of the obvious, an “aha” registered in his thought processes. He was on his way to a Joint Program Office to be a PM. Since his background and experience was on the operational side of DoD, he did not know much about joint assignments or the acquisition community.

Using the project as a vehicle, he decided to design his “strategic approach and personal vision” for the program. He put in his proposal and received a few more ideas. Several conversations with the instructor led to more ideas. Voilà! He completed the project and turned it in.

While he “passed” with a “satisfactory plus,” he was astonished at the comments and suggestions on the paper when it was returned. More ideas surfaced as he started peeling back the onion on this new assignment in light of the new questions, comments, and ideas. The student took these ideas from

the instructor and incorporated all of them into his project. In fact, he changed some of his electives to be able to accommodate more planning and preparation for his new command. He truly was engaged in the process and passionate about the learning, primarily because it was *his* new job. Not only did he end up with many ideas, but he also put together a briefing, which he then used to garner even more ideas as he interviewed executives in the Pentagon and general officers at DSMC.

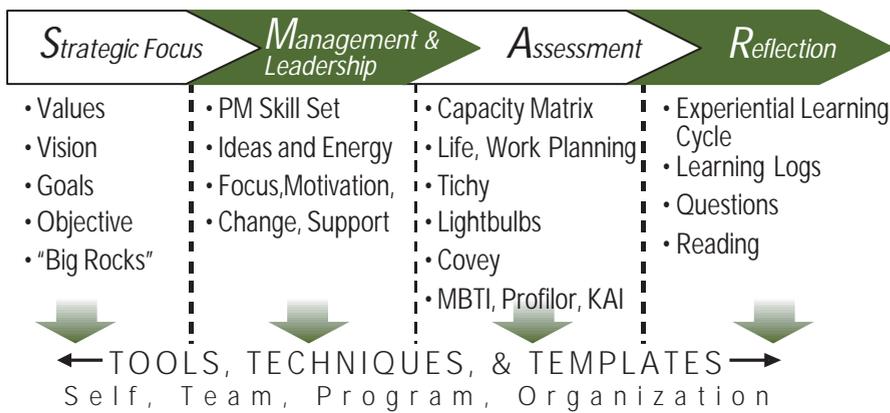
As more and more students used the PML project to prepare for becoming a program or project manager, the ideas, additions, suggestions, and examples increased. During APMC 99-2, one of the students referred to the individual leadership project in preparation for becoming a PM, as developing a SMARTbook—and the name stuck.

PM SMARTbook Elective

During APMC 00-1, the PML faculty offered an elective to assist those members of APMC that were working on SMARTbook in sharing ideas and resources. The elective required more structure and discipline in presenting the materials as well as making the resources and ideas available to all. Using what the students found useful in getting to know themselves and how their leadership impacted others, the SMARTbook model (Figure 1) was developed.

The PM SMARTbook elective supports DoD Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Workforce members as they prepare to lead others in a SMART way. The elective is a collection of tools and techniques from a variety of sources, organized around learning more about the organization, the program, the team, and most importantly, the self as a leader. The emphasis for SMARTbook, however, is preparing to lead others as a PM. Designed for those certified Level III in Program Management or presently at APMC, the elective does not attempt in any way to be a technical course for program management. Rather, its focus is to enhance personal leadership, thereby allowing students to excel in the role of a PM.

FIGURE 1. SMARTbook Model



The PM SMARTbook tools and techniques are built primarily for the project or program manager. For example, the team tools revolve around the concept of Integrated Product and Process Development and Integrated Product Teams. Many of the tools are used in the present APMC curriculum.

However, while the context is program management, the SMART tools and techniques have universal application for any leadership position. Many students who are taking the elective will not be PMs, but will find the tools useful in preparing for other leadership roles.

Types of Tools, Techniques, and Templates in the PM SMARTbook
The PM SMARTbook is a collection of ideas and tools that allow program or project managers to look at the program from the perspective of the organization, the program, the teams within the program, and themselves as leaders within this context. The tools and techniques to look at the organization include the "big picture," i.e., the overall strategy, customers, etc.

The program tools include a program summary sheet developed by students, a "go to" template, and a profile adapted from the National Quality Program criteria for performance excellence. The team tools and techniques are primarily those used as part of the PML curriculum in terms of the Team Performance Model (Figure 2), which includes tools to perform various aspects of the model.

The tools under the "self" rubric are personal development techniques that others have found useful to leverage or enhance strengths to improve weaknesses. SMARTbook is also a collection of many tools, thus providing the opportunity to pick and choose.

Self—The Heart of SMARTbook
Approximately 80 percent of the tools and techniques are geared around the *self*. These tools and techniques are broken down into SMART areas:

- Strategic focus
- Management and leadership
- Assessment of self
- Reflection for learning and general planning
- Tools, techniques, and templates for decision making.

The **S** is for "Strategic focus." Stephen Covey advises, "Start with the end in mind." As a program manager, you can expect a 2½- to 4-year tour. The starting point for a strategic focus is to visualize what your last day on the job will look like. An exercise to help focus this type of thinking includes such things as writing your end-of-tour award, writing the 2006 Program Manager cover story that has your photo on the cover as "The PM of the Year," or perhaps writing your own obituary.

Other aspects of a strategic focus include developing what Stephen Covey in *First Things First* calls your "big rocks." From this you can develop your personal vision statement, your values, and your goals. The work you do in these exer-

cises is the background for a Change of Command speech and literally forms the essence of your command philosophy.

The **M**anagement and leadership section gives ideas to stimulate thought on leading in times of change. This includes the "right stuff" research of DAU professor Dr. Owen Gadenken as well as ideas from noted authors and former students. A variety of "teaching notes" are available in this section, including ideas for formalizing an understanding of the history behind your personal leadership style.

The **A** is for assessment. The assessment section provides a variety of tools to baseline your present skill level and leadership capacity. The tools and techniques include capacity matrices, questions to help you think through the "how" of your leadership style, and the portfolio. The portfolio is useful for documenting, describing, and defending your personal assessments.

The **R**eflection section incorporates ideas for "thinking about one's thinking" or "thinking about one's actions." Tools and templates include learning logs, the experimental cycle questions, "aha" forms, and takeaway templates.

The **T** in SMART is for general tools, techniques, and templates. This section provides a variety of other tools for making decisions, solving problems, and collecting data. Some of the Mindshift Tools from Rolf Smith's *7 Levels of Change* are included. The section also includes many of the management planning and decision-making tools from the APMC curriculum as well as some of the tools from the Air Force version of the Memory Jogger.

Why Does a PM Need to Write a SMARTbook?

Does a PM really need to spend time getting to "Know Thyself?" Are all of these personal leadership tools and techniques for assessing and reflecting useful? Isn't technical competence enough? Isn't being in the military enough? Isn't prior experience enough? Aren't Board-

Select PMs selected because they are already leaders? Who has time for personal reflection?

In the fast pace of today's world, PMs and others in leadership positions are put in the role of "learners" for many aspects of their program because of the frequent initiatives to force "smart" business decisions. Initiatives such as Total Ownership Cost, Cost As an Independent Variable, Balanced Scorecard, Alpha Contracting, Knowledge Management, or Independent Developmental Evaluation are literally being learned as they are being implemented on the job. In *Results-based Leadership*, the authors posit that the half-life of knowledge grows ever shorter in most professions, requiring performers to unlearn what they know and do.

At the same time leaders are learning to implement new initiatives, they are striving to reverse unproductive processes and practices. They are being forced to improve results while eliminating bureaucratic tendencies. To lead in this type of environment, PMs must know themselves; know their strengths; know how to learn, think, solve, probe; know the areas where they are not strong; and have a level of comfort with who they are as a person and a PM. To lead from their strengths, leaders must know their strengths.

Another reason for being SMART is that "typically" PMs must "hit the ground running." Generally, PMs do not have time for extensive "thinking, planning, and reflecting." For most people, the role of PM involves relocation and getting the family settled in a new geographical area. Prior to relocating, most people are up to their ears tying together all loose ends on the job they are closing out. Once they relocate, they start the PM job with very little time.

Planning and organizing prior to starting the job gives PMs an opportunity to reflect on the big picture and their role in leading the organization toward getting the results needed to consistently satisfy customers, employees, and stakeholders.

The bottom line for why personal development is important for PMs is successful program results. Leadership is key to successful results. While many leadership qualities may be inherent to those serving as leaders, leadership skills and abilities can be expanded and enhanced. Additionally, these skills must be taught to others in the program office. A product of the elective is a SMARTbook CD ROM to allow participants access to an e-file containing all the tools and ideas.

During APMC 01-2, U.S. Air Force Academy Cadet 1st Class Isaac Bell worked on the elective as part of a research project. He organized the materials and produced a revised copy of the CD ROM to reflect the organization of the elective notebook. Updated for each session of APMC, the CD ROM includes all materials used in the elective.

A Personal Journey

The SMARTbook is a collection of tools, techniques, and templates that others in the APMC have found useful in enhancing their leadership skills set, thereby producing better results as PMs. Designed to focus on understanding one's self in a self-directed, guided way, SMARTbook is also a compilation of a variety of tools and techniques so participants can pick and choose which of the tools best suit their needs.

Since a primary responsibility for a PM is developing other leaders, PMs must have tools and techniques to do so within the context of daily work. PMs must constantly model personal development in their actions. Asking your team to engage in personal development while failing to do so yourself, is hypocritical. Leaders cannot mentor others without knowing and articulating the techniques they use to create success. Tichy, in *The Leadership Engine: Building Leaders at Every Level*, refers to this process as developing a teachable point of view. The strategic focus, assessments, and reflection tools help build this capacity.

The elective, including the notebook and the CD-ROM, is only a map. Participants must write the real SMARTbook. The tools and techniques in the Notebook and CD-ROM serve as a road map for thinking and reflecting on personal leadership. The tools and techniques must be "worked" to create value. And just like a map, the tools and techniques can show you the direction and a bit of the terrain, but the map does not get you to your destination. Each individual must take his or her own personal journey.

Editor's Note: The authors welcome questions or comments on this article. Contact *Hall* at mj.hall@dau.mil.

FIGURE 2. Team Performance Model

