



# INTREPID INSIGHTS

## The Psychology of Success: Identifying and Hiring an Awesome Project Manager

Posted by [Tamara Glass](#) on Feb 23, 2016 5:04:09 PM

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When I tell people that I have a degree in psychology, their reaction is usually the same:  
*Uh oh, are you analyzing me right now?*

Though I don't want to play into stereotypes, it's true; I'm always analyzing and trying to get a closer read on the people I interact with. I've found this to be a very helpful

attribute; it's a natural habit that helps me understand and navigate the relationships and people I encounter on a daily basis. Though I didn't end up becoming a therapist or even pursuing Psychology in my post-grad years, I've applied these skills in my job as a Project Manager. In fact, I've found my psychological instinct and understanding of human behavior is a crucial part of being a successful Project Manager.

## Crucial Skills for Project Managers

Below I've identified some of the most important intersections of project management and psychology, and provided some tips for how you can identify these traits when looking to hire a PM.

### Personality Assessment & Management

Being able to assess and manage varying personalities is critical for PM success.

Project teams are usually made up of a variety of roles. With those roles naturally come different responsibilities, levels of expertise, and personalities. At Intrepid, an average one-platform development project consists of two developers, one designer, one QA resource, one project manager and often one product strategist. As a project manager, it's our job to not only identify these differences, but to determine how to manage each team member accordingly, yet still equally and fairly.

### Conflict Resolution

Throughout the course of a project, conflicts will inevitably arise – both internally as well as with clients. PMs are responsible for making sure everyone on the team “plays

“nice” with one another. Rallying the troops and getting everyone to calmly respond to difficult situations is a valued skill of a talented PM, and has strong ties to behavioral and cognitive psychology techniques.

So should PMs throw their clients or team members into a [glass box and feed them snacks](#) when they exhibit good behavior? Probably not (depending on how good the snacks are), but the basic assumptions of [cognitive behavioral therapy](#) apply: changing maladaptive thinking leads to change in affect and behavior. As a PM, the ability to influence your teams to adjust their way of thinking about a given issue can positively impact the situation and reduce conflict.

## Ability to Act as a Support System

Not unlike a therapist, project managers act as a sounding board and support system for their teams. Be it simply removing a blocker from a developer’s workflow, or lifting team morale when dealing with a tricky client, project success lies heavily on the PM’s ability to motivate their teams toward a common goal. When setbacks happen, a good PM bears the burden of these challenges *for* their teams and passionately motivates everyone to get back on track. A happy team and client equals a happy PM!

## Assessing these Skills in a PM Candidate

### Hiring a “Psychologically-Adept” Project Manager

So how do you know you’re dealing with a “psychologically-adept” project manager? When I interview project management candidates at Intrepid, I try to go in-depth on each of the above skills, and ask questions that uncover how they interact with others—both internal and client teams.

## Questions to ask to assess their Personality Management Skills:

- How would they describe their management style?
- Who makes up their current team(s)? What roles and levels do they manage?
- What challenges have they faced with managing different roles & personality types?
- How would they gain trust and build a rapport with a new client/with a team?

## Questions to ask to assess their Conflict Resolution Skills:

- Ask them to describe a time they encountered a conflict in their previous position, and how they resolved it.
- Ask them to describe a time they had to push back or deliver bad news to a client. What approach did they use and was it successful?
- Ask how they stay calm under pressure. How do they deal with stress?

## Questions to ask to assess their Ability to Act as a Support Network:

- Ask them to describe a time they encountered a difficult blocker, and how they helped remove it.
- Ask them to elaborate on their relationships with their teams - how do they work together and communicate?

It's important to remember that often, it's not about their specific answers, but the ease with which the candidate is able to vocalize the answers. Candidates with a clear response can answer confidently, because they understand and have experienced this crucial connection between project management and people management.

# Not Just Psychology- Product, Process, People

Of course, the product and process are equally as important. But ensuring that every sprint is hit, every deadline met and every bug fixed is only half the battle of a successful project, and of a competent project manager. After all, the people who make up a project are just as valuable (arguably, more so) than the project itself. Those “extra special” PM candidates are the ones who are passionate both about the role as well as about the people they manage.

So next time you catch me running a daily stand-up or sprint retrospective, think of it as a group therapy session. But with less crying... hopefully.

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