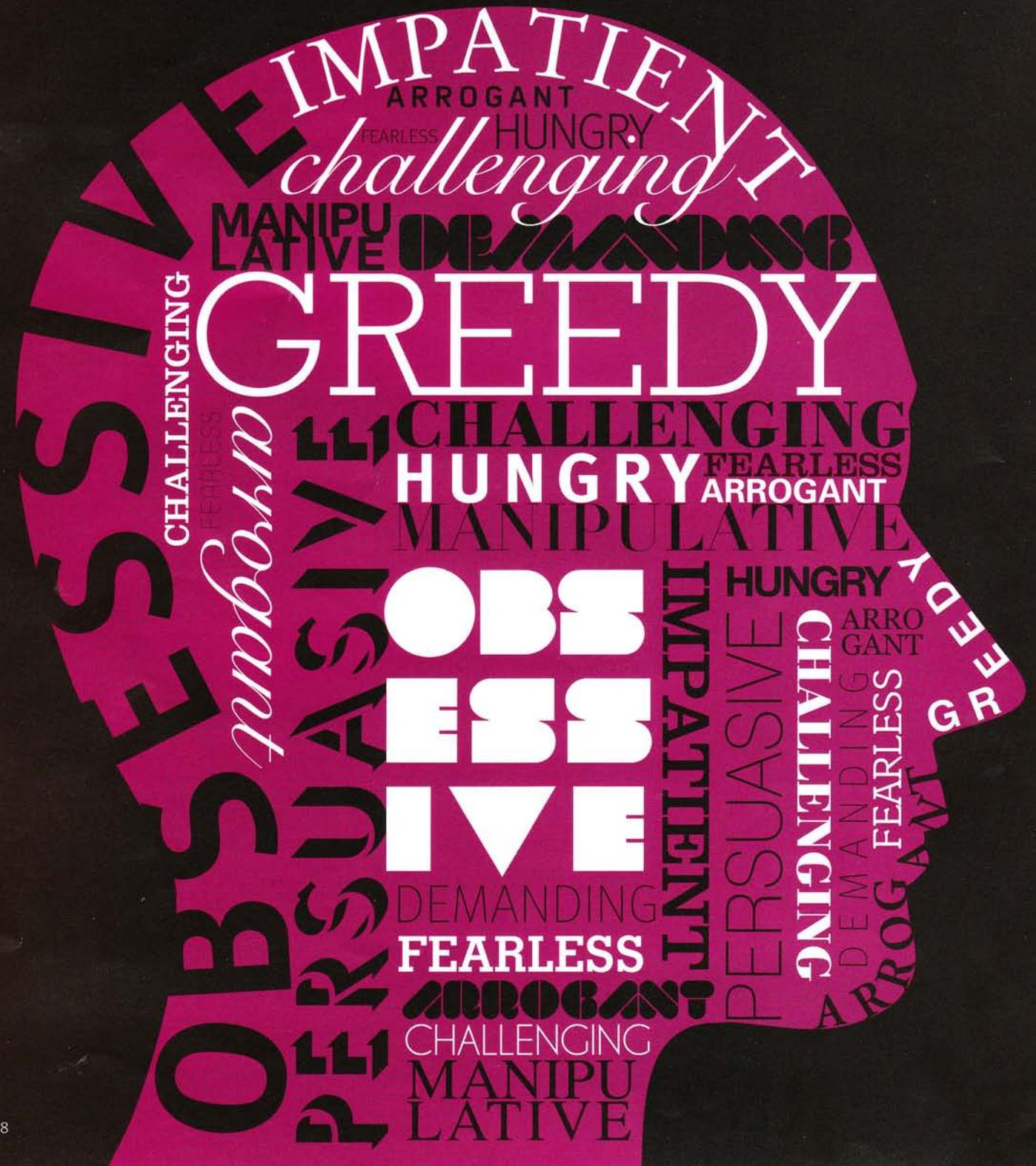


CRUEL TO BE KIND



How does being selfish sit with David Cameron's idea of a Big Society? Very easily, says **Richard Powell**, director of Project Boost. In fact, unless project managers start to toughen up, there will be no community or individual benefits to speak of.



DAVID CAMERON is proposing change to the Big Society paradigm: He said "We need to create communities with oomph – neighbourhoods where people feel in charge of their own destiny and that if they club together and get involved they can shape the world around them."

There is a sea change in attitude and the Big Society is just part of it. As motivators, financial reward and materialism are giving way to being part of a community, building meaningful relationships, spending time with family and following hobbies. Project managers need to be aware of the evolving climate and use it to their advantage.

Key to this is being selfish. It might appear to contradict the new mode of thinking – but a selfish project manager is a good project manager, and is better equipped to deliver the expectations of the new, selfless society.

Being selfish is more important now than ever to help both project and community.

Basic behaviours

There is a common misconception that being selfish is a negative trait. It is seen as egotistical and associated with arrogance and ignorance of others' feelings. But when it comes to successful project management, it's one of the essential ingredients. By being selfish we can make the best use of the available resources and ensure the maximum time for community or work/life balance improvements.

To be the best you must behave as if you are the best. You have to be demanding and impatient, manipulative and persuasive, hungry and greedy, challenging and fearless, obsessive and arrogant.

That may sound like a recipe for disaster, but these are some of the most fundamental and basic behaviours we all share and use in everything we do (even if we don't like to admit it!).

Being selfish is a human trait, it is not wrong, it's how we survive.

Manipulate and persuade

You need to be able to influence the opinions of your stakeholders in order to get the results that you need. As a project manager, you need 'buy-in' from everyone involved in the project, from senior management to your day-to-day co-workers.

Manipulation is just a negative

way of describing negotiation. For the best managers it comes naturally, using guile and experience to get the results they want from even the most difficult stakeholders.

A good project manager will continually assess those involved in a project to work out their value and understand how they tick. Although this is ultimately for your own gain in getting the project completed, by showing an interest in your staff and key stakeholders, and understanding what makes them feel valued as well as what makes them work in their free time, you can create a tight team atmosphere and ensure you fit comfortably with the working environment and are respected at every level.

Rewards will still be required to motivate your team. We need to be exceptional man managers to understand how to make our teams feel valued. Time seems to be the new currency for reward, providing people with flexible working hours and even reduced working hours to enrich their lives outside of the work environment.

Arrogance and obsession

You must be able to separate yourself from any emotional issues within any given situation in order to be objective. Being proud and acting with utter integrity often comes across as arrogance, but it is vital if you are to be a leader and if you are going to be able to control the outcome of any problems.

If you act as if you are the best, then as long as you back it up, people will jump on your train. Success breeds success! You need to instil this in your team too. Encouraging them to strive to be the best and believe that they are untouchable.

To do this you have to be very selfish and ensure resources are committed as planned and make sure the project is kept 'in the now', using data to provide project updates in the principal areas available for

decision making when required. When people feel part of something bigger than themselves and are given the support to do the job they respond. It's all about working very hard to reach the 'tipping point' where the team can be left to complete the work with minimum interference.

Power and influence

This doesn't mean taking your eye off the ball. You need to know what's going on all the time. Being selfish doesn't mean keeping things to yourself; you have to use information wisely. You must not divulge issues that are inappropriate, this will show that you can be trusted, but you have to pass on anything that is beneficial to reaching the team's objectives. You must communicate regularly in a positive way, showing that you are taking on board any issues and comments from both your staff and management.

If you know what a senior manager wants to achieve and you can help him or her get there, then you can get them to impose their power to keep things moving. If you have individuals or groups obviously causing problems and you cannot influence them directly, then speak to the people who can and get something done about it.

A selfish project manager is someone who can be seen to demand more than his team or organisation is willing to commit. Self-belief and pushing hard on to the objectives requires determination and drive. If your organisation benefits by meeting targets ahead of the competition and can support rewarding staff with community-based activities, then surely the selfish project manager is a very good thing?

■ Richard Powell is director of Project Boost, a leader in performance-based project management. For more information visit www.projectboost.co.uk.

SUMMARY

- Project members with the necessary tools and support will carry out the work if they feel part of a team and are valued.
- Selfish project managers will be the ones providing a platform for the other egos to thrive while sitting in the background guiding the project to successful completion with minor touches to keep within tolerances.
- We can thrive in today's climate by appearing selfless and acting selfishly as long as it's for the greater good. Once you become bigheaded or over-confident your popularity will drop.