



## Commitment to winning

Disguises that mask true commitment and prevent success

BY LINDA WOLSTENCROFT

**A**round the boardroom table all the right words were spoken, all the right messages were transferred, and all were in agreement. But the actions that followed were different from what was discussed - and the project failed. To some this was a surprise.

What is it that makes the difference between actions taken that result in success, and people merely paying lip service to the agreement reached in the boardroom? At one company an RFP was received for an important project that the senior executives had been working on for two years; pre-positioning the company for success. After the boardroom meeting with the senior executives (in which the decision was made to pursue and win the RFP) the management in the affected business area began to chatter about the low value of the resultant program, about how much work it would be to formulate a response, about how busy they were with other important projects, and about how this program wasn't really part of the company's core business.

The group in the business area then evaded the issue until there was not enough time left to respond. A competitor won the program, and the winner now has an entrée into this business area and a burgeoning relationship with an important customer. The company who did not bid is still looking to grow its business into this sector.

A lack of true commitment to winning a new program starts with the motivations and objectives of the people responsible to deliver outcomes. Here are some examples:

1. Lack of understanding. The full project team is not on the same page on the stra-

tegic importance of the project. This will result if the corporate business strategy is not clear. And if the corporate strategy is in fact clear, this will result if it is not fully understood by the organization. It is important to ensure that the business strategy is clearly articulated, and that it is well understood throughout the organization.

2. Misalignment of personal objectives and rewards. Personal objectives, and the related rewards provided upon achieving them, need to be aligned with the corporate strategy. Reward systems that cross department boundaries to motivate all towards the same strategic goals have been proven to work well.

3. Personal motivations. Between each person, motivations differ. Understanding personal motivations of key players is a good start. Ensuring alignment between personal motivations and how the project aligns with these motivations is most important. Personal motivations can include:

a. Promotion opportunities. Individuals interested in reaching the next levels with the organization need to understand how the success of the project will improve their chances for moving forward within their organization.

b. Career progression. Individuals who see their current position as a career step to move on to another organization as part of a career progression plan may fail to see how success on this project will satisfy their personal career plan. Even while those individuals are not committed for the long term, if they can be shown that the success of the project will help their future career prospects, they will work towards its success.

c. Workload. If the individuals are already stretched in time required to achieve their primary responsibilities, not only will add-

ing another important project may cause all the projects and responsibilities to suffer but also without resolution to this issue the individual will not perform well.

d. Political factors. At times individuals would like the project to fail but will not show this openly. Turf battles that are ongoing and competition for recognition from senior executives are examples of political factors.

e. External issues. Individuals with non-work issues (family, financial, social, etc.) will have energy and attention focused outside of work.

By ensuring these three main factors are addressed amongst the full project team, your probability of success in the project will increase remarkably. Watch for signs of false commitment:

- Information that affects the project outcome is not quickly communicated.
- Key players disappear from the radar screen for awhile and come back to warn of obstacles and showstoppers, rather than with reports of forward movement.
- There is more talk about the obstacles to achieving the project rather than discussion of innovative ideas for moving the project forward.
- There is lack of cooperation within the project team.

Be courageous and deal with false commitment. Clearly articulate and communicate the corporate strategy and show how the project supports the strategy. Change the conditions for participants to enable them to become committed where possible, and consider changing out key positions on the team where true commitment lacks. Move quickly and allow you and your organization to experience a more positive atmosphere working on the project, with a higher probability of success.

**Linda Wolstencroft** is President of Aerospace BizDev Inc., which provides strategy and business development assistance to the aerospace and defence industry. She has worked with firms such as: Cascade Aerospace, Vector Aerospace, Northrop Grumman, and L-3 Communications. Linda is a Professional Engineer and holds a masters degree in Business Administration