



## PROJECT PASSION, LEADERSHIP ADVANCEMENT: A CONVERSATION WITH INSTRUCTOR DICK DEBLIECK

"What does our timeframe look like?" is the first question Dick DeBlieck asks. A project manager through and through, he thinks in terms of managing a project: what does the final 'product' look and sound like? What are the constraints and dependencies?

And it's no surprise, with more than 35 years of experience as a consultant in the field and over a decade teaching project management at the University of Minnesota's College of Continuing Education (CCE), Dick sees project management as the key to achieving business—and personal—success.



### Everything is a Project

An adjunct instructor at CCE in the [Project Management Certificate Program](#)—one of several management programs in which he teaches at the U of M—Dick brings this mindset to his classes. Project management is central to businesses achieving their goals because project managers get things done, successfully moving projects from start to finish. But more than that, Dick sees project management as central to life. "Everything is ultimately a project: planning a wedding or getting the kids on the school bus," he explains.

While consulting with a client many years ago, Dick was asked to provide project management training that incorporated leadership skills, communication, and teamwork. That led to word-of-mouth exposure, and—coinciding with the growth of project management as a recognized practice—helped to expand Dick's reputation. Seeking to teach beyond the business world directly, he brought those skills to CCE. Having received both his undergraduate degree and MBA at the University of Minnesota, it was a logical fit to transfer his training expertise here.

Dick is a skilled instructor and facilitator, committed to helping students learn the necessary skills in project leadership and motivation that must be implemented alongside the technical abilities and tools. As a long-time mountaineering enthusiast, Dick sees a lot of parallels between the practice of project management and the field of climbing. He often encourages students to ask themselves: what is the summit you're shooting for? What is needed to reach peak performance?

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## A Critical Skill Set for the Future

At its heart, project management is about understanding “what a job well done looks like,” Dick says, and the steps it takes to get there. During his time in the field, Dick has witnessed the growth and standardization of project management practice from a fringe concept to a recognized skill set and profession. Businesses now see the value of project management for the execution of initiatives, and of having employees capable of making changes at the granular level that will improve overall business productivity and performance.

Perhaps most importantly, for those students considering or entering the field, the rise of project management has also led to an increased demand for trained professionals able to manage a project from beginning to end. Those who are capable of planning and leading projects bring the greatest value to business.

“For the individual, if you can plan and execute a project well, you’ve got a job for life,” says Dick. Employees who are “mission-advancing” and create demonstrable value to the business and its clients will see a clear path to career progression.

## Fostering Growth Through Independence and Empowerment

Dick has taught and consulted in this field for many years because of the sense of fulfillment that he gets when helping organizations and employees accomplish important goals. It is gratifying when a student develops professional skills that they can take back to their place of business or out into the world.

To create an environment that encourages student breakthroughs and progress, Dick’s classes are interactive. He uses little lecture, instead empowering the students to participate in a hands-on approach to the content. He has found that excited and engaged students who are having fun are more open and receptive to new ideas—and that the content will stick with them.

The interactive environment encourages people to ask questions and become involved in a way that they may not in a traditional large-group setting. It’s often easier for students to interact in small groups, asking for clarification and helping one another to understand the content. In fact, this is one of the benefits of the classroom learning experience: expanding the professional network. Students will be introduced to new perspectives, make new contacts, and meet others from different walks of life—in Dick’s classes, they’ve even helped one another find new jobs.

## Valuable Takeaways

The key piece of advice that Dick offers to his students is to plan with the end in mind, and not to forget the assumption of success. When in the field, students will know what the end outcome of a project should look like and all of the actions that have to be taken to achieve a successful result. For this reason, Dick recommends building in a victory celebration for when that goal is met.

Other valuable takeaways from Dick’s courses include the reminder that these are transferable skills—people can use their project management skills anytime a goal needs to be achieved, personally or professionally. Students will be equipped to translate a vision into action and take the steps necessary for success by following the project management principles.

## Project Management Beyond Borders

Project management transcends fields and industry sectors. It is a popular method for goal attainment, and has been recognized in surprising and widely disparate industries. Perhaps even more unexpected to many, though, is that the project management skill set is valuable to students in program areas outside of the [Project Management Certificate Program](#).

CCE instructors across the board may find their classes filling up with project managers who have finished their certificates, taken the Project Management Professional (PMP®) exam, and are now back in class, pursuing their required ongoing Professional Development Units (PDUs). The emphasis on the development of skills such as leadership and communication makes project managers ideal candidates for exploring an array of professional skills in continuing education.

And that is Dick’s final piece of advice to students, at CCE and everywhere: take more continuing education classes! The tangible and intangible benefits of continuous learning are almost immeasurable for business professionals.

—by Stephanie Stiles