

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS While Leading Change

Major Everett S. P. Spain, U.S. Army

“Expectations need to be managed from the beginning, and throughout the process—which requires a major effort of public information and education... Otherwise expectations are unrealistic, and [people] are inevitably disappointed. When disillusion sets in, ...people can easily turn against the...agreement they had at first welcomed.”

—Kofi Annan,
Secretary General, United Nations,
14 October 2004.¹

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PHOTO: 1LTAJ. Hensel, 3-8 Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, negotiates with gasoline black marketers along route Irish. He had to walk a thin line between supporting the rule of law and not crushing a neighborhood's economy.

(All photos courtesy of the author)

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE of managing expectations is tough, and actually managing those expectations well is even tougher. But such oversight is a critical factor in leading successful change. I believe many organizational leaders see leadership and its more specific subsets of leading change and managing expectations as primarily unidirectional attempts to influence, rather than the complex two-way processes that they are.

However, to lead significant change, we as leaders will have to revamp our view of managing expectations from a simple perspective of “getting the message out” to one of a complex system of consistent, conscientious communication mechanisms that evolve as the situation develops in order to reinforce the leader-stakeholders relationship.

This paper argues that managing expectations is a critical factor in leading successful change. It goes on to provide ideas for choosing your key stakeholders, then gives a four-part definition of managing expectations, twelve applicable lessons learned about managing expectations, and a framework for analyzing what level and context of expectations management a leader should focus on.

In its essence, managing expectations involves a change-leader seeking out and building effective communication bridges to his stakeholders, and then using those bridges to understand, and to help the constituents understand, the change process. Managing expectations can significantly improve the chance of success to lead change, but it is a complex process that takes a conscientious leader's focus.

Teachers, parents, managers, and educators all need to learn how to manage expectations. Right now, there is probably no place where managing expectations is more significant than in Iraq, where the U.S. Government and the U.S. Army are leading a massive transformation. If the United States is to be successful, many organizational leaders at all levels must make the conscious choice to actively manage the expectations of their key stakeholders.

For example, in providing oversight and legitimacy for Operation Iraqi Freedom, the president of the United States is attempting to manage the expectations of the U.S. Congress, the global media, and international leaders. Lower on the totem pole than the president, but also of strategic importance, is U.S. Army

Lieutenant Jeremy Holman. Responsible for the security of the al-Kinde neighborhood in Baghdad, he is simultaneously working to manage the expectations of the local tribal councils, his military bosses, and disenfranchised, but influential, former members of the Ba'ath regime living in the area. Both Lieutenant Holman and the president have a similar challenge in that they both rely on the support of their stakeholders, via managing expectations, for their success.

Identify Your Stakeholders

As a change-agent, you should know that your key stakeholders' perceptions will determine whether you are successful. Consequently, identifying those stakeholders is the crucial first step to success in leading change. The following are some examples of who the central stakeholders could be:

If you are a U.S. Army company commander in Iraq, your key stakeholders could include your Soldiers, their families, your battalion and brigade commanders, the local Iraqi leaders, and the global media.

If you are a consulting firm vice-president, your key stakeholders could include your team, your managing director inside the firm, the leaders of the firm for which you are consulting (i.e. your client), and often the key influencers of the employees of your client.

If you are a professor and head of a college academic department, your key stakeholders could include the dean, your students, the other department heads, the professors in your department, and even the staff of the school newspaper.

If you are the president of the United States, your key stakeholders include the legislature, the citizenry (via political action committees, the media, legislatures, and U.S. corporations), political parties, leaders of multinational (and state) organizations, and leaders of other nation-states.

The major categories of stakeholders in each of the above three examples are surprisingly similar. In fact, most all organizational leaders have the following categories of stakeholders:

- Employees.
- Bosses.
- Key influencers (and potential spoilers) in your customer base.
- Key influencer peers (and potential spoilers) inside your organization.
- The media.

Leaders should ask the following question to deter-

mine if a person or a group of persons is actually a key stakeholder: *“Does the success of this leading-change effort depend significantly on this person’s active support, participation, or approval (either now or in the future)?”* If the answer to that question is “yes,” that person most likely is a key stakeholder.

The U.S. Government has recognized the need to manage the expectations of key stakeholders for Iraq and has taken some efforts in this direction. For example, the White House recently created the Office of Strategic Communications (OSC), headed by former presidential advisor Karen Hughes, and commissioned it to “ensure consistency in messages that will promote the interests of the United States abroad, prevent misunderstanding, build support for and among coalition partners of the United States, and inform international audiences.”²²

Similarly, the U.S. Army is doubling the size of its Psychological Operations (PSYOP) capabilities because one primary PSYOP mission is to convince Iraq’s population to support legitimate Iraqi Security Forces and Iraq’s democratically elected government. In addition, the U.S. Army recently formed a separate Information Operations (IO) career field for select officers. The IO officers coordinate the Army’s information efforts, which include communicating a consistent, effective message to multiple stakeholders, such as the American public (through public affairs officers) and Iraqi citizens (through organizations such as civil affairs units).

Although these efforts to improve communication across multiple venues are steps in the right direction, they alone may not be enough. The problem is that the OSC, PSYOP, and IO organizations are designed to send messages, but do not place as much emphasis on receiving messages from stakeholders: effectively managing expectations calls for two-way communication, not just unidirectional influence.

Managing Expectations Defined

Managing expectations is consistently communicating with your key stakeholders to understand their spoken and unspoken expectations, while realistically shaping their perceptions of—

- Your true character and intentions.
- The benefits of the long-term change process.
- What constitutes short-term success.
- Specific stakeholder responsibilities required to achieve both short- and long-term outcomes.

Managing expectations thoughtfully is a decision you make. A change-leader has too many key stakeholders with too many diverging goals and internal influences to leave managing their expectations to chance. Your stakeholders will not have realistic, positive perceptions about managing expectations unless you deliberately help them get there. Believing otherwise is overly idealistic. Let us explore in detail how the change-leader must shape the four areas of stakeholder perceptions.

Shaping perceptions of your character and intentions. *“I know everyone from my civilian life, so I have extra incentive to get them all home alive. When we get home, I’ve got to look at all of their mamas.”*

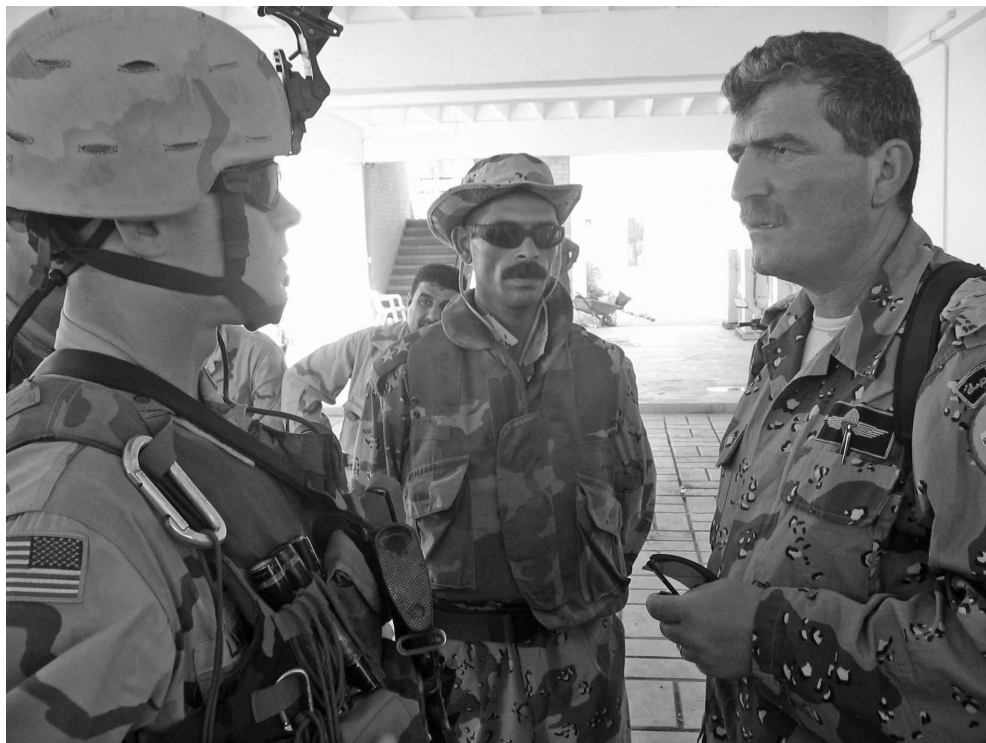
—Staff Sergeant Hardin, squad leader, Arkansas National Guard

If you are truly leading change to serve, rather than to manipulate, you had better prove it fast. The first aspect of managing expectations is to realistically communicate your organization’s intentions and character. For example, when the U.S. Army’s 3d Infantry Division attacked in Iraq in 2003, it expected most of the population to treat it as a liberator, but many Iraqi people turned out to be distrustful and leery of the American Soldiers, likely because the Americans’ true intentions and character were simply unknown to them. Similarly, some members of the global media and the U.S. population believed we were attacking Iraq for the primary purpose of securing access to oil resources in the region. Although the U.S. Government stated that the purpose of the U.S. attack was to enforce United Nations resolutions, suppress terrorism, free the Iraqi people from Saddam’s oppressive regime, and promote democracy in the Middle East, many

Iraqis did not believe this because they did not trust the U.S. Government.

Convincing people you are trustworthy is the key to your influencing their perceptions, and such trust can only be built over time and with effort. For example, to establish trust with the global media, the U.S. military now embeds reporters with deployed military units. Brigadier General Vincent Brooks, the former chief of public affairs for the U.S. Army, said that it is essential to give the media both access and context.³ Let them know and see for themselves what is going on (i.e., provide access), while making a deliberate effort whenever possible to explain why the U.S. actions are what they are (i.e., include context). To illustrate, when Iraqis and the world watch television and see Soldiers passing out food and providing medical treatment, many of their perceptions of the Soldiers’ true intentions and character dramatically change.

Another essential factor when building trust is to study and respect the culture of your stakeholders so that you can better relate to them. This is an essential factor when building trust: by working to understand why they think what they do and



CPT Eric Lawless, a member of 1-161 Infantry Battalion and leader of a mobile Iraqi Army training team, talks with an Iraqi Army company commander and his executive officer at the activation ceremony for an Iraqi Army company. The newly formed unit had experienced officers, but an inexperienced NCO Corps and a severe shortage of equipment.

by practicing reflective listening, a change-leader communicates that his constituents have important values and needs. Even though your stakeholders won't always agree with a course of action, if you give them access and context, and if you listen to them reflectively, your stakeholders will begin to trust you and develop accurate perceptions of your character and intentions.

Building faith in the long-term process. *“A leader’s job is to give their people hope.”*

—Rudy Ruettiger, Notre Dame football player.⁴

A change-leader must help his stakeholders visualize the end state. Challenge and hardships are often associated with the process of change, so the final outcome must be “worth it” to the stakeholder before he or she will support the change leader. Therefore, it is important that the leader help the constituents understand the value of reaching the goals that long-term change requires and encourage them to have faith in the plan.

For example, Major Danny Hassig, a U.S. Army Reserve civil affairs officer, arranged a meeting with Sheik Saad, an influential Iraqi who lived in the Karada Peninsula (the Baghdad equivalent of Manhattan, New York). Because Saad was an informal leader in Karada, Hassig introduced himself and made an effort to meet with Saad every few weeks in order to help manage the expectations of the Iraqi people regarding U.S. forces in Karada.

Saad was wounded in an assassination attempt a month prior to this particular meeting, and was risking his life to meet with Hassig. When Hassig asked Saad what the locals thought about the Americans, Saad explained that his people were pleased that the United States had followed through on its promise to transfer sovereignty from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to Iraq’s temporary government. Saad also commented on how his people had recently seen new soccer fields and new gardens installed in their communities, courtesy of Hassig and U.S. forces funding of local Iraqi contractors. The Iraqis were thankful American Soldiers were patrolling as partners with the Iraqi Police and mentoring the embryonic Iraqi democratic government.

Hassig believed that Saad now trusted him, so he used that trust as a foundation. He asked the sheik to apply for a coalition-funded economic development loan that would potentially energize the economy of the sheik’s neighborhood. Such a large loan would tie

Saad into to a long-term business relationship with the coalition. Saad applied for the \$3.5 million loan because he felt the United States was reliable, pro-Iraqi, and trustworthy. Saad summarized his people’s new faith in the long-term process by concluding, “When we see the U.S. Army in Iraq, we feel safe.”⁵

A wise expectations manager understands and feeds such hope without promising what he cannot guarantee. Author and psychotherapist Viktor Frankel, who wrote about his experiences as a prisoner in the Auschwitz concentration camp during World War II, concluded that a person’s attitude in a difficult time could overpower actual circumstances and give that person hope. However, he noted that in the fall of 1944, when fellow prisoners spread rumors that Allied forces would liberate the prisoners by Christmas, but no day of liberation came, an unusually high percentage of inmates died the next month. Their expectations had been so high that when they were not liberated, their hopes were crushed.⁶

Shaping perceptions of short-term success. *“The Iraqi people know the U.S. has put men on the moon, so they don’t understand why they still don’t have electrical power 24 hours a day, even though they didn’t have 100 percent power under Saddam Hussein.”*

—Major General Ron Johnson, former commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Gulf Region Division.⁷

Managing expectations is a long-term process, but a change-leader can only influence those expectations within the context of consistent short-term actions. U.S. Army Captain Darin Thomson did exactly this when leading his company in Iraq in 2003.

Two weeks after coalition forces liberated Iraq from the Ba’ath Party, Captain Thomson and his infantry troopers (known as the “Bravo Bushmasters”) received the mission of securing and stabilizing the town of Taliyah, which was about 50 kilometers south of Baghdad. Although he and his troopers did not experience any hostilities from the 15,000 locals during their first 72 hours in town, Thomson was concerned that he needed to connect quickly with the local leaders. Thomson’s boss, a lieutenant colonel, had stopped briefly in the town and had a cursory meeting with some local leaders before moving north, so Thomson had to convince the locals that he, a captain, was actually in charge before he could even start to manage their expectations for the more complex short- and

long-term issues, especially since he had no idea of how long his company would be assigned to stay in Taliyah.

Thomson quickly discovered that most of the established local government officials were members of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party and had left town before the Americans arrived. Even though the local government was defunct, four locals came forward to claim leadership roles—including a representative from the town's dominant tribe, the town's electrician and water engineer, a food-distribution supervisor, and a man who claimed to have security expertise. Of course, the priorities of each of these emerging leaders were different. After a few hours of volatile conversation, Thomson heard a message loud and clear. The Iraqis desperately needed and expected U.S. aid in the form of medical care, fresh water, food distribution, and security (i.e., police).

Taliyah's outpatient medical clinic was almost out of all supplies, including medicine, but continued to treat many sick people, including several who were likely wounded from combat. The tribal chief supported medical care as the main need of the town.

Taliyah had received its drinking water from a pipeline that originated in a larger city to the north, but because the power generation facility outside of town was not working, the pumps that ran the pipeline were not operational either. Most of the large pumps had blown gaskets, and only 25 percent of the homes in town were connected to the fresh-water network via underground piping. The town was surviving on imported bottled water, and those supplies were getting low. The town electrician said water was the most pressing need.

Food was scarce. The Ba'ath Party had distributed food to the city monthly via supply trucks, with residents using their government-issued ration cards to request each of their family's share, but the last food delivery had been over a month ago. The Iraqi leader in charge of food delivery argued that this was most pressing for his people.

Taliyah's prewar police force had been led by Ba'ath Party members who left town soon after the invasion and took all of the police department's small arms (AK-47s) with them. The Iraqi who claimed he had security expertise said Taliyah needed 150 weapons and help from the U.S. Soldiers to patrol the city, because its citizens were experiencing an increase in crime, especially violent carjackings.

Clearly, the overall challenge that afflicted Captain Thomson was remarkably similar to that of many city managers during times of catastrophe—too many needs and not enough resources. Thomson assessed his capability to help Taliyah. He had 125 infantry Soldiers, 14 Bradley Fighting Vehicles, and 6 HMMWVs. His unit had no engineer capability, but it did have small maintenance, medical, and food sections, and several Soldiers had civilian skills learned before joining the service that might be useful.

Thomson knew he was the de facto government in town, and he realized that he had to develop an acceptable picture of what short-term success was to the locals, or risk losing his credibility. Therefore, Thomson called a second town meeting and showed the tribal leaders that he had no organic resources available to positively affect any of the major issues facing the town, except for security. After Thomson facilitated a thoughtful two-way discussion, tribal leaders agreed that security was the number-one concern, and that restoring a legitimate security force was the most realistic short-term goal to work for. Thomson also let the Iraqis know he could not provide large-scale assistance for their immediate food and water needs.

He informed the Iraqis what his unit was capable of in terms of medical care, and he did what he promised: he gave them two boxes of surplus supplies, including water-purification tablets. Also, on a case-by-case basis, Thomson's unit treated wounded Iraqis that the Iraqi clinic could not.

With Thomson facilitating, the four emerging local leaders worked out a security plan. U.S. forces would immediately begin patrols to reestablish security and safety in the community. Thomson also coordinated to get the local leaders a few weapons to enable them to arm a small police force. The security plan consisted of patrolling and empowering the new police force. It was successful because Thomson had convinced the emerging Iraqi leaders to agree that security was the primary short-term goal for Taliyah. Instead of becoming frustrated that the U.S. forces were unable to help in other areas of need, the locals viewed the new force as a great success. Because the security the Bravo Bushmasters provided met the Iraqi's expectations of success in the short-term, the Iraqis were pleased with Thomson and the American presence.⁸

Shaping perceptions of stakeholder responsibilities. “*Captain Larry, when am I going to be able to go to the United States and see your universities and set up exchange programs?*”

—Dr. Atabee, Dean of the College of Science, Baghdad University

Managing expectations is also about getting stakeholders to do their part. For example, Captain Larry Geddings, the commander of a mechanized infantry unit assigned oversight of the sector of Baghdad that included Baghdad University, and I met with Dr. Atabee, a Baghdad University College dean. I listened as Atabee pressured Geddings to buy plane tickets and authorize him to travel to U.S. universities to collaborate and create teacher and student exchanges. Geddings smiled and responded that he would look into it, knowing that he could ask for, but did not have authority to grant, Atabee’s wishes, while knowing that Atabee and Baghdad University had a great deal of work to do before such plans would become a reality.

Geddings was concerned that several problems at the university needed to be resolved before he could do anything to promote an exchange program with an American institution. For example, security was still a major issue. An unarmed American soldier had been killed while walking near a dozen students in the center of campus a few months earlier, but witnesses would not admit to seeing anything. University concern for basic sanitation was also a problem, as

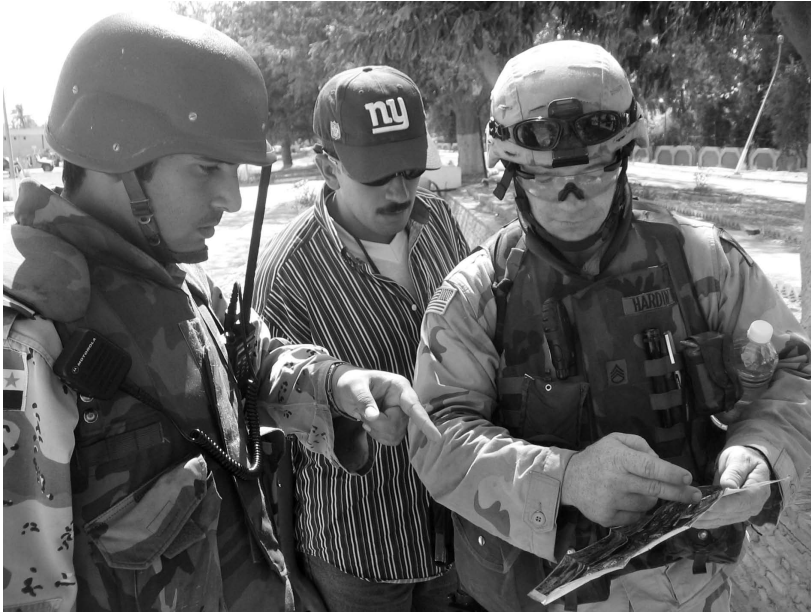
evidenced by the visitor bathroom across the hallway from the college president’s office, which was among the most unsanitary bathrooms of any I had seen in Baghdad. Finally, the legitimacy of Baghdad University’s granting of degrees was in question, since the university had conferred a Ph.D. in political science on Uday Hussein and a Juris Doctor on Qusay Hussein, even though Saddam Hussein’s sons did not spend much time in class. However, Atabee was ready to go to the United States immediately and begin exchanges, and he told Geddings that this was “the way it needed to be.” Of course, Geddings knew that, realistically, before starting an exchange program Atabee needed to ensure his campus was safe, that sanitation at his university was reasonably acceptable, and that the degrees granted were actually earned.⁹

Stakeholders like Dr. Atabee need to understand that stakeholders within a transforming organization typically must take deliberate action to effect some of the changes themselves: they cannot just wait to be changed by the system. The leader of the change effort must clearly communicate what he or she expects the stakeholders to do individually and collectively to make the transformation a success.

Figure 1 depicts many of the broad changes that coalition forces in Iraq are working on. Each requires the Iraqi people to take some action themselves. Although the transformation of all of the areas in

Area of Change	Before	After (goal)	Action by Iraqis
Government	Totalitarian	Democratic	Run for office, vote, support elected officials
Economy	Socialist	Capitalist	Risk money and time via entrepreneurship, compete
Role of common people	Subjects, paid no income taxes	Citizens	Pay income, sales, and property taxes
Equality/suffrage	Male only	Equal rights for women	Males accept gender equality
Political Process	Only Ba’ath Party, only Arab, discrimination and distrust	Multi-party, multi-ethnic	Campaign openly, support all popularly elected officials, respect all

Figure 1. Broad changes coalition forces are working on.



SSG Hardin, squad leader, B/1-153 Infantry Battalion, consults with an Iraqi Army squad leader via a translator and a map before conducting a joint U.S.-Iraqi patrol in Baghdad.

Lessons Learned in How to Manage Expectations

I have learned twelve lessons in my career while attempting to manage expectations. Using these lessons as a guide can help put change-leaders on a path toward creating positive and consistent communication channels with their stakeholders.

Lesson 1: Under-promise and over-deliver. *“We believe the (U.S./NATO) mission (in Bosnia) is limited and achievable within approximately a year.”*

—Vice President Al Gore¹⁰

Vice President Gore’s effort in expectation management may have had some traction at the time, but it

Figure 1 involves significant understanding, defining the role and managing the expectations of the common people in each area are crucial steps for the macro changes to be successful. During Saddam Hussein’s regime, although common Iraqis were not allowed to vote in legitimate elections, they were not required to pay income taxes, either. Furthermore, they received power, water, and often food from the Iraqi Government *pro bono*, as oil revenues funded this dependency-fostering socialist environment. The Iraqi people paid eighteen cents per gallon for gasoline in the summer of 2004, a subsidized rate that caused huge lines at the few gas stations that actually existed, because entrepreneurs had almost no incentive to build a gas station to compete against the government-run and subsidized stations.

American commanders like Captain Geddings have to communicate clearly to Iraqis that they are expected to do their part and vote, adopt an entrepreneurial culture, pay taxes, accept gender equality, and support popularly elected officials if this transition is going to work. Doing this well is a key tipping point for change, as it changes stakeholders from customers into partners in the change process. Stakeholders are much more likely to accept their responsibilities to facilitate change if they trust your character and your organization’s intentions, have faith in the benefits of the long-term process, and understand what constitutes short-term success.

quickly slid into a ditch when we stayed in Bosnia past the one-year mark. (In fact, we are still there more than ten years later.) Gore was likely advised by his experts that his claim was reasonable, but the fact remains that it didn’t strengthen his stakeholders’ beliefs in the organization (the U.S. Government) or the action itself (peacekeeping in the Balkans) to claim something that didn’t actually come true. The fact of the matter is that the United States cannot predict when it will successfully complete a peacekeeping operation. Every situation will be different, and claiming an end date before beginning is like adding up a mathematical sum before having the actual amounts to add together.

Wise change-leaders will always ensure they have a robust enough system to accomplish their promised goals, even if Murphy’s Law hits them in the nose several times along the way. In service professions such as engineering, customers (who are stakeholders) depend on you to do a job for them, on time, on budget, and to quality standards. A customer, boss, or peer probably will not have a clear understanding of the particulars of the job (including the technical and logistical requirements and the impact of environmental factors) that can significantly influence when you can finish. Therefore, it is up to you as the organizational leader to define the measures of success by setting and communicating the timeline and standards that you intend to meet.

For example, assume you are the platoon leader with the 1st Cavalry Division's 8th Engineer Battalion, with responsibility to oversee the infrastructure rejuvenation of the town of Zapharania, a poor suburb of Baghdad located about 10 kilometers southeast of the city center. After driving around the town, you note that liquid sewage is collecting on the sidewalks in many of the neighborhoods. Further research shows that the main cause of the pooling wastewater is dilapidated and overwhelmed underground wastewater pipes. The city leaders ask for your help with this problem.

You decide to work with the city hall officials and local contractors, and conclude that you can fund and oversee a contract for a complete renovation to the city's wastewater lines. Your engineer technical advisors tell you that the project will be finished in two months if everything goes relatively well, and within four months if multiple obstacles come into play. You know that your Soldiers' level of motivation is not a variable, as you will all work just as hard regardless of what you cite as a finish date.

Let us assume that you want to announce your intentions at tomorrow's District Advisory Council meeting with the Iraq authorities. A wise expectation manager will cite the four-month expected finish date. Your unit may be able to finish early and exceed expectations (to the cheers of all stakeholders), but if the external factors turn against you during the project, you will still be able to finish within your projected timeline, and your stakeholders (primarily the Iraqi citizens) will still see you holding up your end of the deal. Remember, only promise things that are within your power to deliver.

Lesson 2: Set short-term goals together with your key stakeholders. In addition to setting realistic end dates for a project, you can (and should) manage expectations by establishing interim short-term goals with your key stakeholders, especially those who have to take specific actions to ensure those goals are realized. This will help you build trust with them and encourage them to commit to their own responsibilities.

Lesson 3: Have your stakeholders commit in a public setting. When you plan to ask stakeholders to commit to an action in a public meeting, always select the location based on who will be present. Public meetings are typically good settings for such verbal commitments because the stakeholders are

more likely to be held accountable by their equals. Your stakeholders' standing with their peers and neighbors often will have a greater influence on whether they follow through on their promises than their agreement with you alone. When stakeholders know that others expect them to hold up their end of the deal, they will be more likely to meet their commitments and will become partners in the change process rather than customers of it.

Lesson 4: Repeat messages to communicate clarity. An expectation manager is fundamentally a communicator, and repetition and simplicity are crucial for effectiveness. In his book, *The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive*, Patrick Lencioni notes that three of his four "obsessions" concern creating and communicating clearly what an organization is doing and why.¹¹ Presidential advisor Karen Hughes states that "As a communicator, I like to boil things down and make them easy to remember. I also realized that about the time the rest of us get sick of hearing about them, is about the time when . . . they'll begin to stick, and people will actually remember them."¹²

Lesson 5: Changing the message is a strength, not a weakness. I caution change-leaders that they must modify their message appropriately whenever the truth or situation changes. If they do not, they risk alienating their constituents, who will then perceive them as a propagandist rather than an authentic communicator. Stakeholders' needs change, and they will actively try to find out whether you are listening to them by watching to see if your actions alter as a result of their new needs and requests.

If you do not listen to them and keep exactly the same messages and actions, you are likely to lose their support, because you will lose their trust. You cannot make all groups happy all of the time, and you must publicly accept and address this fact so that it does not torpedo your change efforts. However, if you change in response to stakeholder

An expectation manager is fundamentally a communicator, and repetition and simplicity are crucial for effectiveness.

needs when possible, it will build strength for your overall endeavors.

Lesson 6: Set up regular meetings and a single communications center. Wise change-leaders should establish a primary, easily accessible central information clearinghouse for updated status and information about short- and long-term goals. The central information clearinghouse could be a public website or blog that is updated daily/frequently, a bulletin board in a hallway that is regularly accessed by all stakeholders, or a daily newspaper with editorial space for the public.

The consistency of communication events is much more important than the consistency of the message itself. Stakeholders want to be informed and can handle bad news: they just want to hear it from the change-leader, and they lose trust when they hear it from someone else. Similar to a civil engineer's charts that track the status of engineer projects against the plan, these central information clearinghouses enable communication with the stakeholders, especially when the clearinghouses present both positive and negative factual stories, while providing a simple mechanism for the stakeholders to send their thoughts back to the change-leader. If these central communication clearinghouses do not have updated information on a daily basis, in a consistent and easy to understand format, they will be disregarded almost instantly.

Lesson 7: Managing expectations calls for establishing two-way communication. Two-way communication with your stakeholders is critical: it is simply not enough to communicate one-way by lecturing or making formal statements to your stakeholders. Research your stakeholders' culture, unspoken expectations, and body language. Ask them to speak their minds clearly and frankly.

Listen reflectively. Mentally put yourself in their positions, and think about what your expectations would be if you were them. This process will help you understand the values their culture holds dear so that you can influence their perception of your intentions.

Lesson 8: Always communicate what is not possible and why. Do not be afraid to say "no," and stick to your guns if doing so is realistic. You run the risk of stakeholders losing faith in you if you promise and can't deliver (recall Lesson 1). A change-leader must always be clear about limits.

For example, Captain Doug Copeland was the commander of Bravo Company, 2-7 Cavalry, and was responsible for providing security in the central Baghdad neighborhood of Salhiya, just north of the International (Green) Zone. His company raided the house of an insurgent and took him into custody in June 2004. A few days later, Copeland took a U.S. patrol to the insurgent's home to inform the insurgent's spouse of her husband's status and to return his wallet and some identification papers she might need in his absence.

Copeland knocked on the door with an Iraqi translator on one side and a large soldier as his bodyguard on the other. The wife came to the door and requested her husband be returned. Copeland quickly gave the wallet and identification back to the wife and told her, "Your husband is going to jail for attacking coalition Soldiers, and he will not be back for a long time." He also told her everything he knew about the situation, including where her husband was most likely going to be incarcerated. He did not have to return the wallet and identification or speak to the wife, but he wanted to ensure he managed the expectations of one of the Iraqi citizens in his security area.¹³

Lesson 9: The organizational leader should lead the managing expectations efforts. To build stakeholders' faith in the overall long-term process, the organization's leader should deliver the most recent managing-expectations message and allow stakeholders to communicate openly with him. If you assign the responsibility for managing expectations to a staff officer or assistant, you send the message that communicating with the stakeholder is an auxiliary task and that he is not important enough for the organizational leader to communicate with directly. That is not the message you want to send to your constituents.

Lesson 10: Being positive is a catalyst in managing expectations. Even when you are unable to meet expectations, providing enthusiastic and cheerful communication will help people see that the glass is half-full, not half-empty, and will encourage their positive responses.

Lesson 11: Don't fear inevitable incidents, just respond promptly to them. In almost any long-term change effort, there will be negative press, rumors, or claims against your leadership efforts. Sometimes the claims will present true incidents

that, when taken alone, appear to hurt your cause. In this situation, your stakeholders may lose trust in your efforts. Such an event may influence leaders to centralize control of their messages and limit the communication and initiative of their subordinates. For example, in some theaters of operation, various U.S. Army organizations require general-officer approval of any PSYOP product (poster, pamphlet, radio broadcast, and so forth). We all know of incidents that have captured the world stage through the global media, but a wise expectation manager will not let the potential of a negative event stifle his ability to conduct ubiquitous, decentralized communication at multiple levels in the organization.

Most change-leaders work hard to keep their organizations 100 percent morally straight and honorable, but, especially in large organizations, there will periodically be occasions where individuals who represent the organization bring discredit to their boss's team. Such unfortunate incidents can cause a temporary loss of your stakeholders' trust. What most expectation managers don't realize is that people expect organizations to make mistakes and typically have a much higher capacity to forgive them than the leader imagines—but only if the organization responds swiftly and publicly with appropriate corrective action. By doing so, the organization will almost always restore that trust. However, if your stakeholders sense a cover-up of any type, you will lose their long-term trust and your ability to manage their expectations. Cover-ups are what destroy trust, not the isolated incident that will inevitably occur, so do not limit communication in fear of such episodes. You cannot prevent them all, and closing down communication prevents you from dealing with them productively when they do occur.

Lesson 12: Get around egos by always using honest, two-way communication. Always present your key stakeholders with a full spectrum of news—good news and some not-so-good news—and provide a mechanism for them to express their opinions to you. Presenting just good news makes you seem insincere and sets you up for discomfort and resistance when you have not-so-good news to discuss.

As a company commander deployed in Kosovo, I thought it was important to sit down with each of my lieutenants and first sergeant once a month and give them written feedback on their performance. I always planned to give them positive impressions

using specific examples I had observed, and I always gave them one area of potential improvement, even when they were clearly the best first sergeant or best lieutenant in the battalion. They also knew that I would ask them for feedback about how I was doing in my job and what specific things I could improve to help our unit. At first, my key leaders were resistant to the mandatory negative feedback during counseling because their only previous experience with such counseling was on a by-exception basis. After a few months, the bulk of the resistance went away. In fact, they started looking forward to such “what I can do better” feedback. My incredible first sergeant valued the “needs improvement” part of his assessment so much that he began asking me for even more things to improve.

Having such feedback is most critical during a long leading-change process. It says, “We are going to truly communicate.” The recipient of such feedback is okay with it because it is routine. He receives it from you and, in turn, he provides input on what you can do better.

Focus Your Efforts by Knowing Your Level and Context

A wise change-leader will use multiple lenses when looking at his situation. This helps clarify the managing-expectations landscape and helps the leader tailor his actions appropriately within the context of idiosyncratic and fluid situations. Calibrating a managing-expectations strategy will differ depending on whether the change-leader is trying to influence people inside his organization, outside of it, or both. In addition, a change-leader must understand what level he is targeting, either strategic (large organizations and/or societies) or tactical (a smaller group of people, most of whom the leader can communicate with personally if he chooses to do so). However, it is important to note that the central themes of managing expectations and the four key perceptions of it remain the same—no matter the level and context of the situation.

A Framework for Managing Expectations

Figure 2 looks at four different situations where one would be managing expectations and presents my view of the ideal amount of activity for key variables at various levels. The key variables

Level	Strategic (large organizations, societies)	Strategic	Tactical (you know everyone you are trying to influence)	Tactical
Context	External (group outside of your organization)	Internal (employees inside your organization)	External	Internal
Example	You are commander of Coalition Forces, Baghdad, and are trying to influence the Iraqis in Baghdad to reduce violence and actively support the newly elected government	You are the commander of Coalition Forces, Baghdad, and are trying to influence your Soldiers to stay polite, professional, and prepared to kill.	You are an Army company commander in Baghdad and are trying to influence the Iraqis in neighborhood Mulhollah 304 to reduce violence and actively support the newly elected government	You are an Army Company Commander in Baghdad and are trying to influence your Soldiers to stay polite, professional, and prepared to kill.
Stakeholders	Iraqi tribal leaders, Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurd party leaders, local imams, city council members and insurgency leaders.	Your subordinate commanders (brigadier generals, colonels, etc).	Tribe leader, neighborhood council leader, police district leader, and neighborhood electrician.	Your lieutenants, senior NCOs, and Soldiers.
Global Media Influence Over Your Stakeholders	High	Low	Medium	Low
Consistency of the Same Message Required	High	Medium	Low	Low
Amount of Two-Way Communication (Listening Required)	Medium	Low	High	Medium
Frequency of Status Updates You Must Provide Your Key Stakeholders to be Credible	High	Low	Medium	Medium
Most Important of the Four Managing Expectations Perceptions	Their faith in the overall long-term process	Emphasis on stakeholders' responsibilities	What constitutes short-term success	Emphasis on stakeholders' responsibilities

Figure 2. Managing expectations overview.

include the impact of global media, consistency of themes required, the priority on listening, the need to update messages, and most important, the four key perceptions in managing expectations.

Managing expectations is fundamental when leading change. Wise change-leaders will work to identify their key stakeholders, build a bridge of two-way communication with them, strive to understand their spoken and unspoken expectations, and realistically shape their perceptions of—

- The leader's character and intentions.

- The benefits of the long-term change process.
- What constitutes short-term success.
- The stakeholder's specific responsibilities to achieve short- and long-term outcomes.

Doing this will empower the organizational leader to understand the complexities of the change situation, enable alignment of goals with stakeholders, and provide mechanisms to promote understanding and teamwork to achieve those goals. Managing expectations is an essential part of the fuel required to make the impossible a reality. **MR**

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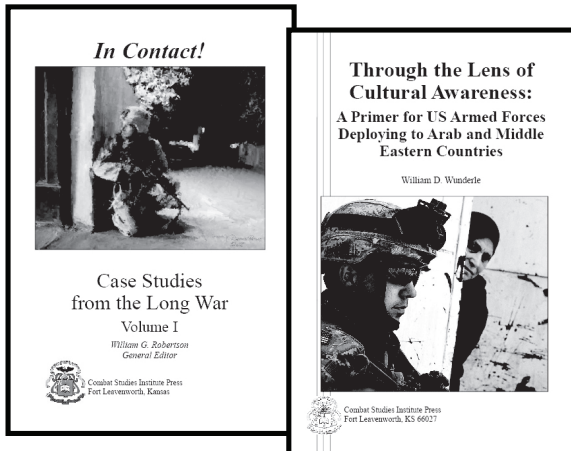
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