

FWPMI Book Review by: Belinda Potter  
"Alpha Project Manager"  
by Andy Crowe

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***Plot Summary:***

Alpha Project Managers from Andy Crowe is based on The Alpha Study, a survey of over 5000 project managers and stakeholders. This study took a careful look at the practices and attitudes of 860 project managers against thousands of stakeholders. The purpose of this study was to understand what the top performers do that sets them apart. The book gives us a short biographical sketch of the 18 Alphas. You will get insights why those 18 Alphas differ from the rest of the group and how that influences project success. The following eight major areas are explored where top performers stand apart from everybody else:

- Attitude and believe
- Focus and Prioritization
- Communication
- Approach
- Relationships and Conflict
- Alignment
- Issue Management
- Leadership

For every area you get the insights about the questions and answers from the Alpha and the non-Alpha ones. Based on these answers the study went back to the project managers and the stakeholders to find answers on the why by additional questionnaires and interviews. Every area chapter ends with an overview what the Alphas know. E.g. Communication: the greatest disconnect between the two groups seemed to be that Alphas were generally aware of how their message was being received by stakeholders. Alphas took the time to understand stakeholder needs in advance, and how they tailored communication to meet those needs. The Alpha group made reliable and predictable communications a priority, even going so far as using this as a tool to manage stakeholders. They set the gold standard by making their information not only very clear and highly concise, but also relevant to their audience.

If you, as a project manager, want to improve your performance and you know your own strengths and weaknesses, this book can be of great help to you to take a next step.

### ***Book Club Meeting Discussion:***

The meeting participants shared many views but consistently all believed that the book was timely and provided refreshing insight. Some of the key points that participants took away from this book are:

- Use your network to get around walls. Walk around, get to know others, don't stick to e-mails and formal communication.
- Alphas believe they have authority and are in a position to lead.
- Must have criteria for success and communicate it. This is essential. It makes the connection for your team and stakeholders.
- Lead rather than just manage. Leadership style may need to change with the stage of the project that is being worked.
- The environment a PM is working in has much to do with the success of the PM. If an alpha is moved to a different environment, they may no longer perform at an alpha level.
- Technology does not equal communication. Be careful about information overload. C
- Communication should be clear, concise, and timely; not noise and chatter.
- Whether you can be in the top 2% alpha group or not, this book offers valuable information for improvement to help make a difference.

### ***Personal Comments:***

This book was a very quick read with valuable information that has helped me evaluate the approach that I take to project management. The author does an excellent job of laying out the data and presenting the analysis of the data provided in the survey. It is clear that there are many variables and that the differences between the alphas and the non-alphas are in many cases very subtle.

Here are some of the items that I found very helpful and will apply to my projects:

- Maintaining focus on the right goals and objectives that are critical elements to project and team success.
- Allow tactical priorities to drive the work, while the strategic priorities drive the tactical. The big picture should be established early and should rarely change.
- Create a channel for open communication with stakeholders early in the project and use this channel to regularly dialog with the stakeholders about communication.
- Consensus – work with stakeholders to agree to support the project even if they have differences with the project. Maybe they can agree that it is, at a minimum, a step in the right direction.
- Use time to help manage the issues list. Allow a few days to pass before adding an item to the issues list to make sure it really is an issue.
- Work diligently to find the space between communication and escalation and use it wisely.

The biggest take away for me is the understanding that personal commitment to self-improvement and self-evaluation is critical to overall growth and success in any career. It seems so easy to say, and yes it even seems obvious, but how much time and effort has been applied to it? It is very easy to settle into the routine and believe that the approach taken in the past to be successful will continue to be the correct approach for the future.