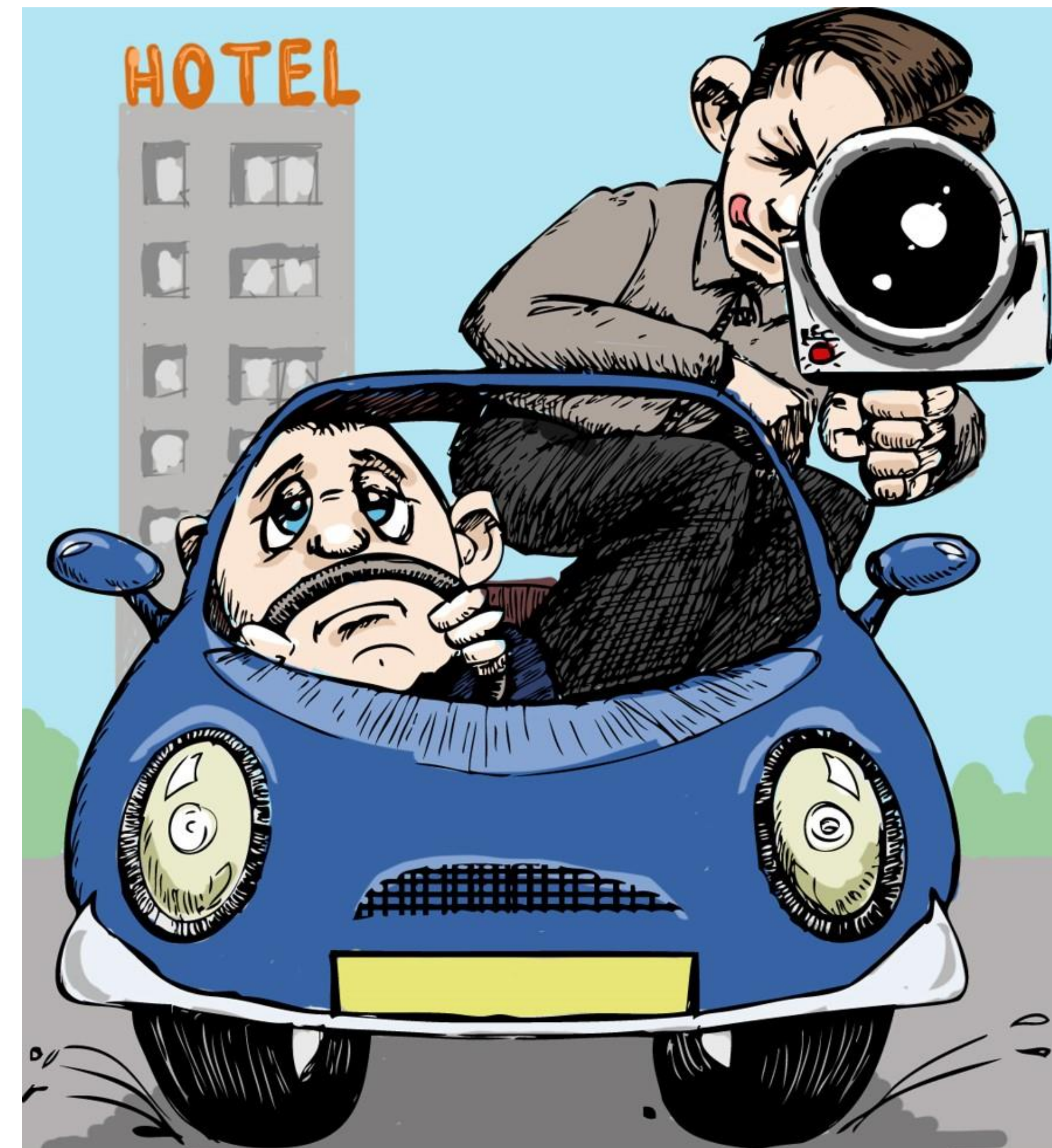


# 18 The Hotel Video

I ran a leadership team building residential, located at a country hotel.

The event required each team member in turn to lead the rest of the group through a time-limited task. The task was different for each leader. I was a 'fly on the wall' observer for each task.



**When technical expertise collides  
with leadership...**

One of the tasks required the team to make a promotional video for the hotel. The designated team leader, in allocating key tasks, chose for himself the role of video cameraman, and from that moment and that decision, the task fell apart.

Firstly, the leader had to be trained in how to use the camera and TV monitor, which took him away from the group he was supposedly leading, leaving them with a vague instruction to 'work out a plan'. When he

returned to the group he immediately asked if someone had a car with a rooftop, so he could video the picturesque approach to the hotel. When the chosen car also had a stereo, he was delighted - there would be a musical accompaniment to the shot.

Off he went, with his driver - again, leaving the team to fend for itself. (They had done as requested, and produced an outline plan, but the leader had ignored it

rush to 'get on with the video'). The team were still deciding among themselves what they should be doing now, when the leader returned, dashed in with the video, and played it through the TV monitor. The visuals were lovely - but where was the musical soundtrack?

The leader turned accusingly to the technician, asking if the equipment was faulty. The technician calmly took the leader through the equipment set up, and discovered that the leader

has failed to switch the external microphone on.

Furious with his mistake, and now under time pressure, he grabbed the camera and dashed back with his driver to the car. He still had given no time to the rest of the group....and in his haste he'd left the video tape in the TV monitor!

I waited, and watched the rest of the group, now feeling distinctly leaderless, just sit waiting for their next assignment (disinclined to

proceed since their first task had not in the yet been considered or signed off). I mentally calculated the time it would take for the leader to discover his mistake and rush back. Sure enough, after about 10 minutes, we all heard the squeal of tyres on the loose gravel outside, as the leader rushed in, ejected the tape, and turned to me. “You knew I’d left this in the machine!” he said. I simply responded that I was a passive observer, and

couldn’t intervene. Furious, he grabbed the tape, and without a glance at the rest of the group, set off once more to make the driveway shot...

Teams, especially in their early days, or for a time constrained project, need clear leadership; someone to manage, allocate and co-ordinate the various tasks, and to keep the project on time. This is almost impossible to do if the leader allocates

themselves a key specialist role. As they become more involved in the delivery of that role, their leadership role suffers. It is almost impossible to do both well.

It is understandable why leaders do this - there are three good reasons:

1. They want to be seen to be taking a full share of the workload
2. The team is likely to be under-strength for the tasks needing to be done

(though this was not the case, by design, in this event)

3. So few people experience the role of team leader, that when thrust into it, they are likely to retreat to the comfort zone of something they are familiar with, or want to do (and of course, being leader, they have the power and opportunity to pick....)

But the leadership role is vital to the team's success,

as is clearly evidenced by the example given here. By focusing on his own technical role, he lost sight completely of his leadership role – for which he was severely criticised in the debrief (which followed the failure to complete the task within the time allocated).

This story has a happy end: the leader learned a vital lesson that day, and has since gone on to head a group of regional newspapers. Which is, I suppose, the purpose of a

training event. But in case you don't get a similar opportunity, remember this danger if you are ever asked to lead a project team., or lead the formation of a new team...

“If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten” (R. Kipling)

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