

Five Project Management Myths

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No matter what business you're in, we're all plagued by myths. They can be a system of beliefs in our organization, on our team or in our family. Project Management is no different. We also can get tangled up in myths about efficiency and saving time that can actually end up thwarting our success. Here are five common myths that I often see in Project Management and some tips on how to avoid them.

Myth #1 We don't have time to back track

Let's face it, things happen. Customers change their minds about what they thought they wanted, market forces change, new threats and opportunities arise and new priorities surface. All of these changes can make the original goal of our project obsolete. Don't fall into the trap of forging ahead without developing a new project agreement and project plan.

In my experience, it's better to spend half a day re-launching the project based on the new project agreement than to create a final deliverable that no one wants, or to attempt to complete a project with inadequate resources and lack of support from the project sponsor.

Make your project agreement a vibrant, living document that is written knowing there will be changes. Make it a document that everyone understands and feels a part of. When you write a project agreement and simply file it, it doesn't breathe and set the stage for further communication and discussion through out the project.

When you're developing a new project plan from the new project agreement, you may also be able to use the interim deliverables you've already created for the new project, ultimately shortening the project cycle time for the new project.

Myth #2 Working well together is fluff stuff

I'm not suggesting a group hug at every milestone. I'm talking about the impact on the project when people aren't working well together. The bad news is that an inability to work together towards a common goal can mean failure. The good news is that you can find the root of the cause and change behavior. Look for these gnarly roots: lack of commitment, lack of interaction, and lack of interest in constructively resolving conflict. Many projects also lose and gain people during the execution of the project. When this happens, it is important that the team spend a half hour together developing their new team guidelines and meeting protocols. With any new people joining the team, it becomes a new team. Re-developing your guidelines and protocols is done for the same reason it is done initially – to facilitate working relationships, to create a way to positively interact,

and to prevent destructive conflict. Don't let "new" deter you, instead let new people bring new ideas and energy to the project.

Myth #3 Document only what the boss wants to see

Selling up is always important, but don't stop document only what you want someone to see. It's important to include the good, bad and the ugly. Industry standard Project Management practices require a critical project closeout phase that collects lessons learned and gives your organization powerful historical knowledge from across the enterprise. Think of it as giving every project a chance to take center stage and be a stand-up for the day. A company that can learn and grow, rather than continually repeat mistakes will move faster. As an employee, it's frustrating to recreate the wheel. It's empowering when you see your work building upon others and vice versa.

Myth #4 Don't beat a dead horse

When you have success, it's hard to overdue it with communication. People need to see, hear, smell and taste success, even small victories have a big impact. It's important to communicate and show success with early adopters, so people will understand what you 're doing and how they can be a part of the ongoing success.

Myth #5 That'll Never Fly Here

Maybe you've been around the block, but don't disregard the ideas of your team. For people to communicate, they have to be in an environment that is safe and that allows for some blue sky and off beat thinking. If you foster an environment that shoots down ideas, then people will stop sharing ideas, and instead just take the easiest path with the least resistance. This is what we call mediocrity.

The next time you conjure up one of these myths, stop and rethink your approach. You can make changes – big and small – by beginning with your own awareness of them. Think of Project Management as a tool that clarifies, illuminates and unifies, and ultimately brings you closer to the goal that is just ahead.

About the Author:

Michelle LaBrosse, PMP, Founder, Author of Cheetah Negotiations and Cheetah Project Management. Michelle has been designing and teaching accelerated learning programs for business since the early '90's and traditional courses since the '80's. LaBrosse holds a B.S. Aerospace Engineering, and an M.S. Mechanical Engineering. She has done extensive postgraduate work with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Center for Advanced Educational Studies and the University of Washington Industrial Engineering Program in accelerating adult learning in corporate environments. Her research focused on using the Internet to accelerate adult learning and in determining effective adult learning strategies using accelerated learning with improvisational comedy.

In 1995 she prototyped the concept of accelerating learning using "virtual classrooms" and created online courses in business development. In the late '90s LaBrosse created and extensively tested a one-day approach to teaching Project Management while a corporate Research Scientist in Learning Techniques and Technologies for a large multinational corporation. LaBrosse has 15 years practical experience in Project Management on small to medium size projects starting with her career as an Air Force Officer and continuing through her formulation of many small business development project teams, Internet application project teams, and as a Research Scientist.

Based on her accelerated learning and Project Management experiences, Michelle created a very fast way for launching projects called Cheetah Project Management. She is the leader of the course development team at Cheetah and sets the strategic direction for the company. In her rare spare moments, Michelle enjoys spending time with her children, friends, and dogs; golfing, hiking, kayaking, traveling, skiing, classical music, Broadway shows, and throwing parties for her family and friends in Alaska, Nevada and Connecticut. She's also been known to brew a batch of beer on occasion.