Five Project-Management Myths

Here's how to dodge some common barriers to getting things done.

By Michelle LaBrosse

Project management — the art of getting things done as effectively and efficiently as possible — is the place where strategy jumps off the page and into human hearts and hands. But, powerful as project management is, we can sometimes get tangled up in myths about saving time and money that can end up thwarting our success. Here are five such myths and tips on how to avoid them.

People need to see, hear, smell, and taste success.

Myth #1: We don't have time to backtrack

Let's face it, things happen. People change their minds about what they want, new threats and opportunities arise, and new priorities surface. Such changes can make your project's original goal obsolete. Don't fall into the trap of forging ahead without developing a new plan. It's better to spend half a day relaunching your project than to end up with something no one wants or to work with inadequate resources.

Make your project plan a vibrant, living document that's written knowing there will be changes. Make it something that everyone understands and feels a part of. When you write a plan and simply file it, it doesn't breathe and nurture communication throughout the project.

Myth #2: Working well together is fluff stuff

The bad news: An inability to work together toward a common goal can mean failure. The good news: You can find the root of the problem and change behavior. Look for these gnarly roots: lack of commitment, lack of interaction, and lack of interest in resolving conflict.

If you lose or gain people during the project, it's important to spend a half hour together developing new team guidelines. Whenever people leave or join a team, it becomes a new team. Recreating your guidelines will facilitate relationships and prevent destructive conflict. Don't let "new" deter you; let new people bring fresh ideas and energy to the project.

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Myth #3: Document only what stakeholders want to see

A common mistake is documenting only what you want people to see. You must include the good, bad, and ugly. Project-management standards require a project closeout phase that collects lessons learned and gives your organization powerful knowledge to keep it growing rather than repeating mistakes.

Myth #4: Don't beat a dead horse

When you have success, it's hard to overdo it with communication. People need to see, hear, smell, and taste success. Even small victories have a big impact. It's crucial to communicate the accomplishments of early adopters so people can see how they can be a part of the ongoing triumph.

Myth #5: That'll never fly here

If you foster a culture that shoots down ideas, people will take the easiest path with the least resistance. The result is mediocrity.

Make sure your organization's environment allows for some blue-sky and offbeat thinking. People need to feel safe sharing even their wildest ideas. That's when the most creative solutions appear.

Reach beyond the myths

The next time you conjure up any of these myths, stop and rethink your approach. You can make changes – big and small – by beginning with your own awareness. Think of project management as a tool that clarifies, illuminates, unifies, and brings you closer to the goal that's just ahead. ■

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Resources

Angelica, Marion, "Eight Steps to Managing Conflict," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 20, No 4.

LaBrosse, Michelle, "How to Get It Done," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 25, No. 6.

Ray, Darrel, "The Key to Building Productive Teams," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 21, No. 4

These resources are available at www.snpo.org/members.

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