



Say Yes to Solving the Problem

When your project gets into trouble, use these problem-solving keys to get back on track.

By Todd Williams

If you're innovating and trying new things (which you should be doing), you're going to encounter problems. How do you keep them from derailing your project? The solution is good leadership. Lead each of your projects with the following keys in mind.

Keep Problems from Happening

You can't prevent every problem. But you can keep them from happening needlessly. To avoid problems in the first place, there are four crucial steps:

1. **Build** the right team, and monitor it closely.
2. **Start** the project on the correct premise.
3. **Understand** and mitigate risk.
4. **Accept** and manage change.

Acknowledge Problems when They Occur

Acknowledging a project's problem is like Alcoholic Anonymous's 12-step process: The first step is to admit you need help. Don't put off this first step too long. Ask for help the moment you see a problem begin to develop.

Denial is the biggest roadblock to solving a project's issues. People always think they can make it better with just a couple more weeks. They can't. They need to re-evaluate the project's goals.

Beware of Technology

Technology makes almost anything more efficient. However, before you apply technological tools, have the right people and processes in place. Otherwise, you'll get into trouble just as badly as before, only faster and much more efficiently.

Audit Your Projects

Too many project managers are overly passionate about their project. They root for it like a high-school cheerleader. Your job isn't to advocate for the project. Your job is to be objective – passionately dispassionate – and determine what's working and what to get rid of.

Trust the Team

The answers to a project's issues are in the team. Talk to team members. Ask for their input, and hear what they have to say. Learn from them. Be one of them.

Don't Search for Blame

When problems crop up, it's tempting to try to place blame. Not only is it a waste of energy, but finding someone to blame will give you only fleeting pleasure, and you still need to fix the problem. It's like peeing in a dark pair of pants: You get a warm feeling, no one else notices, and you have a horrid mess to clean up.

Believe in the Data

Data and numbers hold the answer. Numbers are truthful little bastards: Squeeze them hard enough and they'll tell you the truth. It's integral to their job.

Negotiate the Solution

There are three parameters that control a project – scope, schedule, and budget. So to solve problems with a project, you need to involve stakeholders to change one, two, or all three

of these parameters. Identify the people who are affected by these changes and negotiate the solution with them. 

Todd Williams has over 25 years of experience turning project lemons into lemonade. He is the author of Rescue the Problem Project: A Complete Guide to Identifying, Preventing, and Recovering from Project Failure (rescuetheproblemproject.com).

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