

THE PROJECT HAS GONE AWRY

THREE TIPS TO KEEP YOUR PROJECT ON TRACK

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SCOPE

This is more than the engagement letter

TIME

Allocating sufficient time to complete the scope document is critical to the success of the project.

COMMUNICATION

The seven principles of improvisation is a useful tool in project management because it helps to strengthen the communication process.



Does this scenario sound familiar? It's 10pm, you're in your office reviewing the daily project report for your firm, and it isn't going well. There is a rapidly approaching hard deadline, and you're beginning to wonder if all the work can be completed on time. The client is late delivering the documents you need to complete their project. Your team is frustrated by the long hours and heavy workload. Adding to the tension and frustration in the office, partners are accepting new clients and over-promising results. How did this happen? Why do some of your projects get derailed, creating a bottleneck in completing others? Why is managing projects so challenging?

What is project management? The Project Management Institute defines project management as "the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet project requirements." They state that project management processes fall into five groups: initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and control, and closing. Additionally, project management knowledge draws on ten areas: integration, scope, time, cost, quality, procurement, human resources, communications, risk management, and shareholder management.

Let's focus on three of the project management knowledge items that will help you avoid a project going awry as described above. Those three things are scope, time, and communication. The quality of our deliverables is dependent on these three items:

Scope + Time + Communication = Quality

Develop The Scope Of Your Project

The scope needs to clearly define the sum of the products, services, and results you want to achieve. The scope document is not an engagement letter.

For every project, the scope will go well beyond a standard engagement letter. It should be the roadmap for your project.

Allocating Sufficient Time

Developing a detailed scope document takes time, so allowing adequate time to complete this process is critical to the success of the project. Some of the essential elements of this document include, but are not limited to objective, constraints, structure, defined roles of the team, deliverables, proposed budget, and approval.

Creating the project timeline, including phases of completion, is key to all parties staying on track. To establish this timeline, work backward from the due date to the project start date. You should add a conservative amount of time as a buffer to allow for the unexpected.

The scope document will help in adapting to any changes that occur during the project. For example, establishing clear due dates for the client to deliver records to your firm. Delays in receiving this information will obviously put extra pressure on getting the project completed – your time buffer will help keep the total project on time. You should be able to adapt the schedule, work with other clients, and stay productive while you wait for the information to arrive.

Communication

Finally, communication is the key component to ensure that the project is completed on time or adjusted due to unforeseen circumstances. Keep your stakeholders well-informed. Talk with your staff so they work as a cohesive, motivated team.

The seven principles of improvisation is a useful tool in project management because it helps to strengthen the communication process. The seven principles of



improvisation are respect, support, trust, listen, focus, adapt, and Yes! And.

Let's examine these seven principles:

1. **Respect:** You have to respect the other person, and they have to respect you. As Denzel Washington said in the movie, *Remember The Titans*, "I don't care if you like each other or not, but you will respect each other. And maybe... I don't know, maybe we'll learn to play this game like men."

2. **Trust:** You have to trust in your team, and your team has to trust in you.

3. **Support:** You must provide your team with all the resources necessary for them to be successful. And they must always support you as the leader of the team.

4. **Listen:** You need to listen to understand and not listen to respond. You need to park your agenda and listen to the wants and needs of the other person. That is listening to understand, or active listening. If you interrupt while someone is speaking AND force your agenda on them, you are listening to respond.

5. **Focus:** You must be focused and present at the moment. You can't be thinking of your next meeting, or the phone call you just had or what you are picking up for dinner. That kind of multitasking is dangerous, like texting and driving. Stop it. Focus on the person and the conversation and get rid of all distractions.

6. **Adapt:** Now you are in the position to adapt. You

can adapt by asking another question or presenting an alternative idea. By keeping the conversation going in a positive direction you may uncover potential brick walls and navigate around them. You may even figure out your agenda is the right agenda!

7. **Yes! And:** It's about agreement, but not always agreeing. In other words, set aside your agenda, step into the other person's reality so you understand it. Move the conversation forward in a positive direction, all the while knowing that "no" might be the result.

Think of it this way: How do you feel when someone responds to you saying "No, because" or "Yes, but?" Deflated, uninspired, shoved aside, unappreciated.

Try using "Yes, And" to keep the conversation positive.

Developing a well thought out and detailed scope document, including a realistic timeline, is the first step in managing any project. For a project to be successful, clear and concise communication is the key element. This communication is not always top down. Empower your team to communicate up to managers and partners when they see potential issues arise within a project or even in your firm. The partners need to park their ego and encourage respectful two-way conversations so alternative solutions and new ideas can be developed.

Don't become a victim of crisis project management! Remember, communication is the key and the principles of improvisation will help your project become a success.

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