HOW TO BE A GREAT PROJECT MANAGER

DO YOU WANT TO BE A MORE EFFECTIVE PROJECT MANAGER?

There is a growing demand for people with project management skills.

PMI predicts that there will be nearly 16 million new jobs created in project management by 2020 so whether you are starting work as a project manager for the first time or have plenty of experience behind you it's an exciting – and growing – profession to be in.

You can always improve the way you manage projects and good project managers never stop learning. The more you improve, the greater the level of project success you will achieve. In this ebook I will step you through the things that you can do to improve the way you manage projects every day.

I'll show you how to:

- Define your role
- Set goals and achieve them
- Improve your decision-making skills
- Write project documents that stakeholders will read and action
- Deliver presentations that get results
- Manage day-to-day tasks
- Get recognized for your work
- Boost your personal confidence
- Get a work/life balance
- Invest in continuous professional development.

This ebook contains dozens of the tips, tricks and techniques that I have learned over the years both as a project manager and as CEO of ProjectManager.com. Apply them to your projects and see how much more effective you can be as a project manager.

Best wishes

Jason Westland,
CEO and Founder of ProjectManager.com

Contents

Let's start at the beginning. What does a project manager do all day?

Your official role as a project manager is to deliver your project on time, within budget and to the required specification. There are 5 things that you need to do well in order to achieve this:

1. Build a high-performing team

Great projects are delivered by a high-performing team. Your role is to recruit the best people you can find to your project team. Make sure that their skill sets are perfectly complementary so that you have all of the experience you need to deliver the project successfully.

You need to create a detailed job description for every person in your project team so that they all know what is expected of them, every step of the way. Only with an effective team and with everyone having a clear understanding of what is expected of them will you deliver the result you are looking for.

2. Motivate and lead

Being positive and supportive towards your team, leading by example and motivating others to do the same are essential. If you want others to work hard, then you need to demonstrate a strong work ethic yourself. How do you do that?

- Lead by example
- Set the direction for the team
- Motivate them to do their best work
- Show that you care about them and their contribution.

A project manager should manage the team effectively and make sure that everyone knows what is to be done and by when. There are times when you might need to be strict and "crack the whip" to ensure that every task is done on time and doesn't slip. There are times when you can empower your team to make the right decisions by themselves.

If your project does slip, your role is to identify the slippage immediately and implement your contingency plans so you can get back on track.

JARGON BUSTER
SCOPE CREEP:

When the scope of your project expands without being controlled.

What's the problem?

Scope creep means extra work for your team, probably with no expectation of extra money for the project or extra time. Everyone takes on more, and because you've accommodated one new change, the client thinks that it's OK to suggest a couple more. There comes a point when you can't deliver on time and your project never finishes because there is always 'just one more' tweak or change to do.

How do I handle it?

It is always easier (and more cost-effective) to make changes early in a project. The difficulties really start when you get further into the project and the deliverables are nearly finished. Making a change at this point can be very costly as it involves a lot of rework. Use a change management process to stay on top of requests for change.

3. Manage the finances

Every project has a budget, whether it's clearly defined or not. You need to ensure that you don't spend more than you're entitled to, or your sponsor/client will be dissatisfied with the end result.

Manage finances carefully by listing every expense and ensuring that they are budgeted upfront. Tell your client as soon as possible if you notice any unbudgeted expenditure and be completely transparent in your financial dealings. If you need more budget, then don't be afraid to ask for it.

4. Control change

As the project manager, you are the person who tightly controls all changes to the project scope. "Scope creep" kills projects. Define the scope of the project upfront and then review it each week to make sure that you're not doing unauthorized work at any time.

Your customer will ask for changes throughout the project. Never accept a change without assessing the impact it will have on your budget or project plan - most changes cost money and add time to your schedule.

You can accommodate changes, but your customer should be aware of, and agree to, any impact that has on the rest of the project. Control the changes on your project so you only work on items that have been approved and clearly incorporated into your plan with any additional resources required.

5. Communicate clearly

Project managers are the main source of communication about the project. Build time into your week to communicate the status of the project regularly. Your project team will be motivated by knowing how things are going, and it will give your stakeholders confidence that you have everything under control.

Use project dashboards and reports to get your message across clearly.
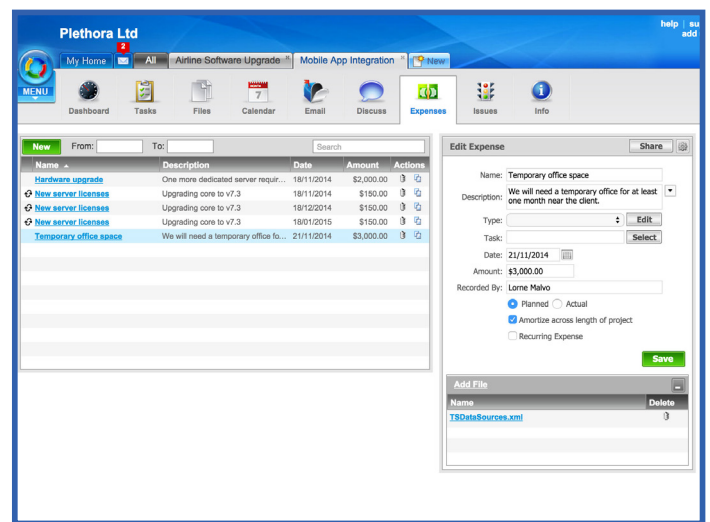
MORE TOOLS TO HELP YOU BE A GREAT PROJECT MANAGER

1. Build your team: Use resource planning software to manage your team

2. Motivate and lead: Read more about Building a High Performing team

3. Manage the budget: Watch this video about how to track project expenses

4. Control change: Read more about project change management

5. Communicate: Use a communications plan template to tell people about your project

How to Set Goals and Achieve Them

Great project managers are extremely good at setting goals and achieving them. Every project has a defined and published delivery date, so you need to be goal-orientated if you want to deliver your project on time. There are 5 things to consider when setting goals.

1. Identify what's important

On a project it can feel like everything is a priority. Take time to sit down with your project sponsor and identify what is really important to achieve. Ask them this question: "If there were three critical things that the project had to deliver, then what would they be?"

The three things might be "delivering on time, under budget and to specification". Or they might be producing three key deliverables, or even three major business benefits.

2. Define your goals clearly

Take these three important things and turn them into project goals. Remember to make your goals SMART— Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-Bound.

Using the SMART approach is a good way of making sure that they are clear enough for you to work towards.

Read more about setting clear project objectives here.

3. Communicate your goals

Upload your goals to your project management software and make sure

everyone on the team has access to them. You can also print them out and put them on the wall by your desk or in another visible place. Then take your team out for lunch and tell them what the three goals are and why they are important to achieve.

Share your goals with your other stakeholders, including any contractors, suppliers and business representatives that may be involved with the project. Make sure everyone working on the project knows what has to be done and by when so you're all on the same page and working towards a shared vision for the project.

4. Create an action plan

WHY HAVE ONLY THREE GOALS?

It's simple. There's so much that goes on in a project that if you have too many goals, they won't be front of mind and may get diluted.

It's much easier to remember and focus on three things long-term. That's also why you need to keep them short and simple. If you set three or more goals, then you'll probably forget them within a week, making them harder to achieve.

Remember, if your priorities change, you can amend your goals: they aren't fixed forever.

Having the goals in front of you every day will help, but you need to take them seriously and create an action plan to achieve them. Revisit your project plan and identify all of the tasks that will specifically help you achieve your three goals.

These tasks are now the "high priority" tasks for the project and together they form your action plan.

Assign your best project team members to these high priority tasks and make sure they have everything they need to achieve them.

5. Monitor progress

Use project dashboards to focus on the high priority tasks in your plan. A dashboard can show you the progress being made on those important tasks on a daily basis which gives you the ability to monitor the work.

Track the project status daily and resolve any issues that arise as quickly as possible. Personally oversee the tasks and the resources if you need to. If they slip, take quick action to bring them back on track. Do everything in your power to make sure that these high priority tasks are completed on time, so that you can achieve your three goals and lead your project to success.

PROJECT DASHBOARDS SHOW YOU HOW CLOSE YOU ARE TO ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS.

A Good Project Dashboard Should:

- Make it easy for you to see progress visually
- Update in real time
- Allow you to drill down into the detail
- Enable you to share the information with other people

Simple steps for improving your decision-making

There are lots of decisions to be made on projects and in the fast moving business environment you might not always have lots of time to reflect before making a decision. Your project team members and your project sponsor will look to you to put forward recommendations and make decisions based on your knowledge of the project and your judgement.

So, when time is short and the project team needs an answer, how do you make sure that your decision is the right one?

It's actually not as complicated as it might sound. Making a decision is a process that generally starts with a problem and ends with a solution. Most successful leaders use the same five steps for making decisions. By following these five steps for every decision you make, you'll make better decisions faster and you'll feel good about it.

1. Investigate the problem

Decisions need to be made when a problem is presented to you. The first step is to spend time considering and identifying the root cause and make sure that it is not just a symptom of another underlying problem. Project problems are usually related to people, processes, equipment or materials. Find out when, why and how it occurred and its impact on the project.

2. Prioritize the issue

On projects, problems occur all the time. You need to determine whether each problem needs your urgent attention or not based on its impact on the project. If it's high impact (e.g. it's preventing your team from working) then it is a high priority and you need to focus on getting it resolved quickly so your project can get back on track.

3. Identify the solutions

With a clear understanding of the problem and its priority level, you can then spend some time identifying potential solutions to address it. Once you have a list of potential solutions you can then review each alternative to determine whether it:

- Solves the root cause of the problem
- Is easy and practical to implement
- Will prevent the problem from re-occurring.

HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS?

- Use your subject matter experts to help.
- Discuss the problem as a team.
- Brainstorm ideas together.
- Look at lessons learned documentation from other projects.
- Ask other project managers in online forums like the Project Manager Community on LinkedIn or in your company.
- Don't discount any ideas until you have analyzed all the options.

4. Make your decision

Now you have all of the information you need to make your decision but try to take your time to make the decision in a considered manner, however pressurized your working environment. Take the time to carefully consider all of the pros and cons for each option. Go for a walk, or if it's really important (and you have the time) sleep on it so you have a clear head when deciding.

You can make non-important decisions quickly, but great project managers are really sure about their justifications when they are making decisions which are critical to the success of the project, so take the time that you need.

5. Act on it

If this is a decision that is within your power to make, you can now act on what you have decided. There is no point choosing a route forward unless you are fully committed to implementing it. Act on what you have decided immediately by telling your team about it and then scheduling the tasks needed to make it happen.

There are some situations where you can't actually make the final decision yourself but you have been asked to put forward a recommendation. In this case, you'll want to present your recommendation to your project sponsor. Talk through the options you considered and rejected, explaining why you came to the decision you did. Your project sponsor may not agree with your recommendation but once you have the final decision from them get your team lined up to complete the necessary tasks.

Remember, every problem affects your project in some way, so you need to act quickly once you've decided on what to do.

Use this issue log template to keep track of the problems you encounter, the decisions you make and the plan required to put those decisions into action. Project management software typically includes issue management capabilities (review the one from ProjectManagement.com).

MORE RESOURCES FOR MANAGING PROJECT ISSUES

1. Use this 5 step approach for issue management to deal with problems
2. Learn the 3 critical things to include on your issue log
3. Get issues resolved quickly by speeding up issue escalations

ISSUE LOG

Project Title: _____   Last Updated Date:: _____

ID	CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	PRIORITY	OWNER	ACTION PLAN	STATUS	DUE DATE
001	Procurement	The contract is not yet signed with Supplier A	High	Claire Tomlinson	Chase up with supplier and Legal team	Open	Next Tuesday

Write Great Project Documents Without The Headache

Projects create a lot of documents because they are the main way of formally defining what it is you are going to do.

Putting something in writing makes it clear for everyone and if everyone understands the goals you are far more likely to achieve them.

You'll also use project documents for communicating with stakeholders, formally and informally, as well as recording decisions and planning.

Here are some tips for how to improve your writing skills and produce powerful project documents that your stakeholders will find easy to read and understand.

Keep it simple

Effective writers can cover whole topics in just a few short paragraphs. Remove any surplus content, clutter and jargon and write in plain, simple terms that everyone understands. That way your documents will be quick and easy to read.

Make it focused

To create a powerful project document, you need to focus purely on the topic. This will make your document more persuasive and inspiring to read. Think carefully about the content that your readers expect you to cover, list your topics and stick to them. Never write off the topic. If you need to go off topic, then put the content in an Appendix at the end and refer to it.

Read more about making your reports meaningful here.

Have a clear structure

Think carefully about your Table of Contents. Your readers need to be able to scan the Table of Contents to get a quick feel for what your document contains. The Table of Contents should be simple and easy to understand. Where it is relevant you should also:

- Use tables to make numbers, budgets, and milestone dates easier to read
- Use sub-headings to help your reader understand where they are
- Insert diagrams to explain difficult topics
- Use short paragraphs to accentuate points
- Make use of bold, italics and underlining to highlight key points
- Use bullet points rather than long paragraphs as they are easier to read.

5 GRAMMAR MISTAKES TO AVOID

Grammatical errors in your documents make you look less professional and can erode your credibility as a project manager.

1. 'Your' shows possession as in 'your laptop'. 'You're' is a contraction of 'you are' as in 'You're late for the project meeting.'

2. 'It's' is another contraction. It's short for 'it is' as in 'It's a good job we mitigated that risk.' 'Its' is a possessive pronoun as in 'its impact'

3. 'Fewer' is for when you can count items as in 'There are fewer risks on the log this week than last week.' 'Less' is for when you can't count it as in 'Grammar errors make you look less professional'.

4. 'Affect' is a verb as in 'This issue will affect our ability to complete the project on time.' 'Effect' is a normally a noun and used to describe impact as in 'The effect of this risk would be huge'.

5. 'There' is often confused with 'their'. Use 'their' if the thing you are describing belongs to a group: 'I've got their user requirements.'

Make it flow

Write your document so that each section flows from one topic to the next. Don't make the reader struggle to work out where they are. Introduce the sections as you go through the document and explain how they build on each other.

Just the right amount

Give your readers just the right amount of information needed to make a decision or take an action. Keep it short, but informative and helpful.

Don't waste time writing documents from scratch. Get free project management templates here and find out how to use them in this article from our blog.

Name	Type	Date	Size
Budget Sheet.xls	Excel Worksheet	8/17/2010 12:07:33 AM	13K
Business Case.doc	Microsoft Word Document	8/17/2010 12:07:47 AM	238K
Feasibility Study.doc	Microsoft Word Document	8/17/2010 12:08:01 AM	238K
Project Charter.doc	Microsoft Word Document	12/2/2009 3:45:06 PM	324K
Project Plan.xls	Excel Worksheet	8/17/2010 12:08:13 AM	13K
Project Status.doc	Microsoft Word Document	8/17/2010 12:08:27 AM	238K
Resource Plan.doc	Microsoft Word Document	8/17/2010 12:08:42 AM	238K
Site Photograph.JPG	JPG Image	8/17/2010 12:09:21 AM	7K

TYPES OF PROJECT DOCUMENT

- Project proposal
- Project charter
- Project plan
- Risk register
- Procurement management plan
- Requirements traceability matrix
- Stakeholder analysis matrix
- Work breakdown structure
- Quality management plan
- Change log
- Configuration management plan
- Project reports
- Project closure document

And many more! Watch this video to discover the 5 project reports that you should definitely include on your project.

With all the documentation that surrounds projects you'll definitely want to look into how to streamline your project paperwork and how to set up a document library to store your records.

How to Perfect your Presentation Skills

At some point in your career as a project manager, you will most likely have to stand up and present to a room full of people. Many people fear public speaking and go out of their way to avoid situations where they have to talk in front of an audience. Project managers don't have the luxury of being able to dodge public speaking. Whether you are talking to five people in a board meeting or 500 in a town hall-style meeting, you'll have to give presentations throughout your project management career.

Public speaking is a challenging skill to master. But if you prepare carefully, take it slowly on the day and are enthusiastic about it, then you will deliver a powerful presentation to your colleagues.

Here are some useful tips to improve your presentation skills to help you prepare and overcome your nerves.

1. Prepare with care

You'll need to prepare carefully if you want your presentation to go well. Start by thinking about your topic and the audience and what they are most interested in. Then list your key points and write down the general structure of the presentation.

If you are nervous or are new to presenting, you may prefer to write down every word that you want to say and memorize it. This will boost your confidence and settle your nerves on the day. However, try not to make it sound too scripted and make sure you emphasize the key points. Experienced presenters generally don't need to write everything down but will often have a list of key points or bullets to prompt them.

Pro tip: practice, practice, practice! The more you know your material and are comfortable with what you are going to say, the easier it will be.

RESOURCES FOR ADVANCED PRESENTATIONS SKILLS

1. Watch this video to learn how to deliver a great presentation

2. Learn 5 reasons why you should improve your communication skills

3. Read about how to give a great client presentation

4. Find out the 5 ways that you can practice and improve your presentation skills

2. Body language

It's said that 80% of a successful presentation is about body language, and only 20% is about content. These top tips will help you communicate the right message through your body:

- Make eye contact with people at all times. Never stare at the ceiling or the back of the room as you present, unless your nerves start to get the better of you.
- Appear confident. Use an open stance, stand tall and proud.
- Smile and let your personality shine. Don't be overly formal.
- Remember that relaxed body language conveys honesty and openness. Walk around a little and make use of props.
- Vary your voice and use slow, open hand gestures. Never have your hands in your pocket or play with a pen. Move your hands to an open position and then pause for effect.
- Speak slowly and carefully, but passionately. If you're enthusiastic about the topic, then your listeners will be as well.

Pro tip: practice in front of a mirror or video yourself giving your presentation at home. Watch yourself back to see how you really look when presenting.

3. On the day

Keep on top of your nerves on the day. If you have practiced adequately you'll be feeling confident about what you are going to say. Make sure that you know where you have to go, at what time, and who you are meeting when you get there. Here are some other tips for your presentation day:

- Get a good night's sleep beforehand. Eat a healthy breakfast and try to free up your schedule, so you're more relaxed going into it.
- Spend 15 minutes going over your presentation beforehand.
- Concentrate on your breathing for 2 minutes. This focuses your thoughts, relaxes you and gets rid of any nerves.
- Remember, the opening and close of your presentation are the most important parts. Put in extra effort here to make it memorable.
- If you forget something or make a mistake, don't stop to apologize, just keep going and try to relax. It will soon be forgotten.

Pro tip: Get to the venue well before your scheduled presentation time so you can set up your equipment and familiarize yourself with the room.

4. Spark interaction with the audience

Encourage interaction with others during your presentation. By having others talk for a few seconds, it takes the focus off you temporarily. This gives you time to clear your head and focus on the key points ahead.

Another trick to clear your head is to pause while your team are reading a slide or considering key points you've just mentioned.

Using role play with real examples is a constructive way to get audience participation and encouraging questions can make for a lively discussion.

Pro tip: End your presentation with a question to the audience. Ask them what they remembered most about your presentation. If you can, give away something to the person who asks the first question to encourage more interaction.

Take it further

Watch some project management training videos to see the ProjectManager.com experts present. What can you learn from their delivery and style?

You also have to be confident presenting at online or virtual meetings. Read these 4 tips to improve your virtual presentations here.

Manage your day-to-day tasks

Once you've been managing projects for a while you'll realize that it soon feels as if you have far too much to do. Great project managers juggle a lot of balls but there is a simple way to keep on top of your work, even when it seems like you are never going to keep up.

You need a stellar To Do list.

Project managers who struggle to stay in control of their tasks often have To Do lists all over the place: sticky notes on their monitors, lists on the mobile phone, tasks in their collaboration tools and on project plans. When projects get busy even organized project managers add more tasks to their lists than they are completing in a single day and it feels as if you'll never get ahead.

So how do you avoid that and manage your To Do list professionally to make sure that you never drop a task?

Let's look at some ways to structure your work using To Do lists to help you deliver your project successfully, every time.

You only need one list

If you have lists in your car, on your PC, in your pocket or at home, then merge them all into one list. Do it today!

Group the items in your list and put them in a logical order or in categories. As soon as you've done this, you'll immediately feel like a weight has been taken off your shoulders, because everything you have to do is now all in one place. You're ready to take the next step.

Set clear priorities

Upload your list into your project management software and prioritize it based on:

- The amount of work each item will take for you and for others
- The complexity in completing the task
- The importance of the task to the project
- The deadlines for completion.

If you aren't sure what your priorities should be then take your list to your project sponsor and get them to help you identify the tasks that are the most important right now. Remember, priorities on projects change, so be prepared to shift your effort between project tasks as they become more or less important.

Many lists

⌄⌄

One list

⌄⌄

Add priorities

⌄⌄

Add dates

⌄⌄

Manage online

SHHHHH, HERE'S A WORK MANAGEMENT SECRET

You won't be able to get all your project tasks done. Project managers don't talk about it, but there often simply isn't the time to do everything.

Identify the "critical path" tasks which are those that must be done to complete the project. The question you should ask yourself is, "If this task is a week late, will the overall project slip by a week?" If the answer is yes, then that task is on the critical path to success. You need to complete these critical tasks as a higher priority than others. Other tasks can be done later, and sometimes not at all.

Add dates

What do you have to achieve by when? Write down your targets and deadlines. If you're unsure what these should be, speak to your manager or project sponsor. Ask them them to list the top five things they want you to do and by when. Your project team will also help you define the dates for project tasks as they are the experts who know how long each item is going to take.

Set target completion dates for your critical tasks. You then need to do everything in your power to make sure that these dates are met. Don't worry about setting firm dates for non-critical tasks. It takes too much time and things change anyway. You'll come to those tasks as you go along.
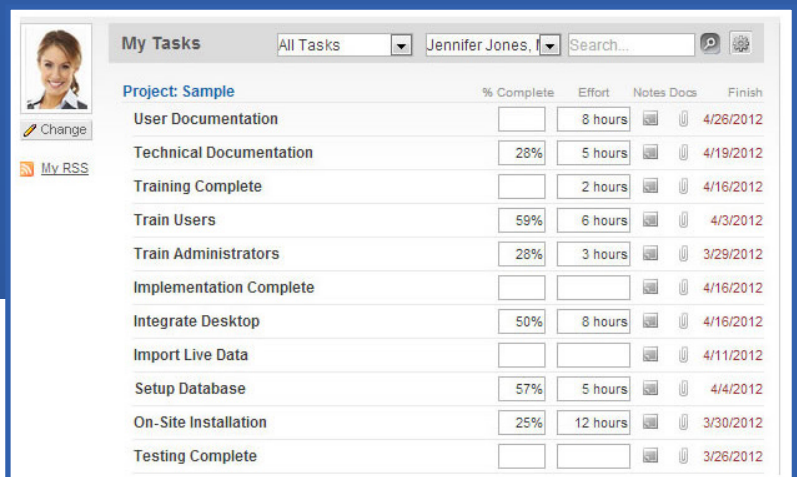
Manage your lists

Use your project task tracking software to help you manage your To Do list and project tasks. As the project evolves, tick off the tasks as they are completed. And when new tasks arise, decide whether they are critical or not and if they are, then set targets dates for them as well.

Keep your To Do list online so you can access it from wherever you are – you never know when you'll need to add a new task. This will help you keep your list up-to-date and avoid slipping back to having multiple pieces of paper and sticky notes for recording your work.

MANAGE YOUR TO DO LIST LIKE A PRO

1. Want to know how to create the perfect task list? Find out how in this article.

2. Avoid these 6 task list problems.

3. Unsure of the difference between a task list and a project plan? This video will clear it up.

4. Once your list is complete, use these 5 tips for prioritizing your tasks.

Shout about your successes!

Great project managers get rewarded and recognized for their performance on a regular basis. If you don't feel like you're getting the reward and recognition you deserve, it may be that you're so focused on your projects that you haven't had a chance to tell others about the value you're providing.

If that sounds like you, think about how you can boost your personal brand so that others can see your successes. Remember, reward and recognition go hand-in-hand with success, but if no one knows about the work you are doing, they can't reward you for it. Don't rely on them to notice. Grab every opportunity to show others why you deserve recognition for your efforts. Here are eight sure-fire ways to help you get the recognition you deserve.

1. Form the right relationships

The first thing to consider is from whom do you want recognition? Whether it's your manager or CEO, you need to build your relationship with them, ideally on both a personal and business level. Make them aware of your role, how critical it is to the business and why they should care.

2. Set expectations

Don't expect your manager or project sponsor to realize that you are working minor miracles every day: talk to them about the challenges you are faced with and how you are using good project management practices to overcome them.

3. Show how hard you're working

Every boss expects their team to work hard. You need to show them that you're going the extra mile and why you're different than the other project managers in the organization. Make sure that they know what you are doing to satisfy your clients, whether that is through extra hours on the project or simply helping your team through a busy patch by keeping morale high.

SHARE THE CREDIT, TAKE THE BLAME

You should shout about your successes but don't do it at the expense of other people. Give credit to your team when they have done an excellent job and try to shelter them from any blame when things go wrong. The buck stops with you as the project manager when it comes to mistakes but be generous sharing praise.

3. Celebrate small successes

Don't wait until the project is finished to promote it. Take a small success and tell people about it. Even if your project is delayed and the team is under pressure, share those small successes. This helps keep team morale high and shows your project stakeholders that you are keeping the project moving forward.

4. Report progress

Use dashboards and project reports to share your project's progress as frequently as you can. This demonstrates that you've got the project under control, you're keeping the momentum going and it gives your managers the feeling that you're progressing well.

5. Focus on what's ahead

Even if the project is running late, don't dwell on the current state instead focus on the work you're doing to get it back on track. Always communicate the positive side of the situation to your manager, so it looks to them like you have it all under control. And if you don't have it under control, then...

6. Ask for support

Don't ever be afraid to ask for support from your manager and to tell them the absolute truth. You might need more time, people, equipment or even advice from them. By getting their support regularly, you're actually getting more buy-in from them for your project. It's another opportunity to build your relationship with them by asking their advice about how to handle a difficult situation. You can guarantee they would prefer to help out at the start of a problem than be told about it when it's too late to do anything to put it right.

7. Give a "heads up"

Keep your manager informed regularly by giving them a "heads up" when critical issues hit your project. Never let them wait to read about issues in a Project Status Report or meeting. Tell them the news (especially bad news) as early as you can so they have time to digest it before you seek their feedback.

8. Celebrate big wins

Congratulations, you've delivered on time and under budget, or at least one of the two. Celebrate it celebrity-style. Throw an office party, shout morning tea for the team or at least take the team and your manager out to lunch.

Promote your project in your company newsletter, take photos and consider a press release. It's time to shout out your success from the rooftop, instead of just getting caught up in the next project.

Remember, people only get reward and recognition for successes if those successes are visible. The more visible they are, the easier it is for your management team to give you the recognition you deserve.

MORE RESOURCES FOR SHARING YOUR SUCCESSES AT WORK

- Use status reports to formally communicate project wins.
- Learn the behaviors you need to accelerate your professional success in this video.
- Uncover the 5 tips for boosting your project management career

Join the ProjectManager.com LinkedIn community and celebrate your project successes with us!

Boost your Self-Confidence

Project managers all have crises of confidence. You wake up one morning and wonder if that decision you took was really the right thing for the project. The best performing project managers have a high level of self-confidence. If you're not 100% confident, then it will impact on your ability to achieve success.

For some people, confidence comes naturally and to others, they need to work at it. Let me share some golden rules that will help boost your self-confidence.

Rule #1: Look after yourself

Confident people look and feel good. The first step towards boosting confidence is to start with your physical and mental state. Try to eat healthy foods, reduce junk food and drink plenty of water during the day.

Do a little exercise every day. It'll work wonders. Go to the gym or take up a sport. Get a new haircut, buy some new clothes and treat yourself a gift that you'll value. If you look and feel fantastic, then you'll start each day feeling wonderful.

Rule #2: Set simple goals

When you get to work, set simple and achievable weekly goals. On Friday night when you leave work for the weekend, you'll have a sense of achievement that you've done what you set out to do. This will give your confidence a fantastic boost. Make sure you tell people about the goals you've set, and when you achieve them. Never make your goals too hard or too easy to reach. And each week, stretch yourself a little more so that you're constantly performing at higher levels.

HOW TO FIND A MENTOR

Ask Your Manager

Your manager is not a good person to have as a mentor as you already have a relationship with them. A mentor outside your direct hierarchy is normally better, although your manager could informally mentor you about certain things.

Talking to your manager is, however, advisable. They can help you identify who could be a possible target and you can tap into their network of colleagues.

Ask Your Project Sponsor

Your project sponsor is a senior manager and has his or her own network of senior, experienced colleagues. If you let them know that you are looking for a mentor then they can put you in touch with anyone they think would be suitable.

Again, it is not advisable to ask your project sponsor to mentor you as you already have a close working relationship with them and mentoring sessions are likely to turn into chats about project progress! However, if you do get on well with them and they have the time, when your project is over you could perhaps approach them and ask them to be your mentor.

Ask Your HR Department

Is there a formal mentoring scheme that you could join? Many companies have formal schemes that support new project managers. They work by pairing a junior member of staff with a more senior counterpart. You may not get to choose your mentor but a lot of the admin will be done for you.

Even if there isn't a formal mentoring scheme in place (or there is and you are not eligible for it) then you can still ask for advice from HR. They know what training courses and development opportunities there are for senior managers and they may be aware of individuals who are looking to improve their coaching skills who would love to act as your mentor.

Look Outside Your Business

Your mentor does not have to come from your own organization. Unless you have a particular reason to want to meet face to face, you could ask online groups if they know of anyone. Or your friends and family who work in big organizations – maybe they are aware of managers in their businesses who would be a good fit for you and are happy to be mentors.

You can 'meet' your mentor virtually online with webcams and Skype or have chats over the phone. Be flexible about your arrangements and you may be surprised at the sort of person who would be willing to work with you.

Ask Your PMI Chapter

Many PMI Chapters have members who are willing to mentor new project managers. There is a reason for this – volunteering as a mentor helps a Project Management Professional (PMP®) keep their credential up to date as they get credit towards their professional development time through mentoring.

This makes your local PMI Chapter a useful place to start looking for a mentor as you'll meet some enthusiastic people who are keen to help.

Rule #3: Get a mentor

Find someone who is honest, wise and that you can trust, and ask them to be your mentor. It might be a family member, friend or colleague. Meet with them (virtually or in person) on a monthly basis to talk about the goals you've set and what you've achieved. Get their feedback and advice on any problem you're experiencing. Their feedback and support will boost your confidence even further.

Rule #4: Ensure a work/life balance

To be at the top of your game, you need to have a careful work/life balance (and we'll discuss that more in the next section). Having a balance between work time and 'other' time means juggling your project commitments and personal responsibilities effectively. Be aware that if you overwork yourself tiredness and stress will knock your confidence. Limit your work hours and make the most of your personal time by doing things you enjoy. If you get the most out of life, then your confidence will grow each day.

Rule #5: Keep learning

Aim to learn something new as often as you can. If you are starting out in your project management career this is going to be pretty easy but even if you are an old hand at managing projects you can still develop your professional skills.

Keep learning new things through reading, online research and meeting people to learn from them. This will not only improve your performance at work but it will give your confidence a wonderful boost because of the extra knowledge you're gaining.

HAVING A CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE? CHECK OUT THESE RESOURCES.

1. Learn some more easy ways to build your self-confidence.
2. Uncover your project management skills gap so you can improve your weaker areas.
3. See if one of these 4 ways to deal with stress would help you feel more confident.
4. If you know a colleague is struggling with their self-confidence, find out about ways to help a team member.

Getting the work/life balance you deserve

Do you ever feel that your projects are beginning to take over your life? It's quite a common feeling because project managers and teams often work long hours on a project to ensure its success. Work becomes everything and as a result, your personal life becomes secondary.

It doesn't have to be like that, and it shouldn't be.

You can have a great working life and personal life at the same time. It's called having a good work/life balance and you get it when you prioritize your life as highly as you do your work.

What is a work/life balance? It's about getting the maximum enjoyment from your work time and personal time, every day. This means really enjoying the time you have at work, and the time you spend after hours so that you're getting the most out of what life has to offer. The reverse of this is not enjoying your job, and not having a personal life.

Those are the two extremes and most people fall somewhere in the middle. However, nearly everyone can take at least one small step to improve the quality of your working and home lives. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Prioritize

Sit down with a nice warm drink and ask yourself if you had to review your adult life to date, then what would you say about it and what would you wish you'd done differently? Think long and hard about this question, and then write down your answer. Now set out a clear vision for what you're going to do differently from this point onwards. You may not need to make radical changes to improve your life. It's usually just about prioritizing. Write down a new set of priorities for your life, ones that mean the most to you.

Set goals

Set yourself three personal goals to help you get the maximum enjoyment from your work time and personal time every day. For example, your goals might relate to:

- Your physical health
- Your personal time
- The way you approach your work.

Together the goals must help you to achieve your perfect work/life balance – whatever that looks like for you.

DO YOU HAVE A GOOD WORK/ LIFE BALANCE? QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Do you spend time at home thinking about work?

Do you check your emails and alerts before you go to bed and when you get up?

Do you take work phone calls when you should be spending time with your family?

If you answered Yes to any of these then your work/life balance isn't as good as it could be. Take action now to avoid burning out.

Watch your hours

It makes sense that to achieve a perfect work/life balance, you need to enjoy both your work and your personal life. If you work around the clock, then you may not get the time to have a personal life. Try and balance your work time, family time and personal time, so that you actually make time to achieve your goals.

Project management is a varied job and some weeks there is more work to complete than others. Take advantage of the slower times on your projects to get ahead with your personal goals so that you don't resent having to work long hours at busy times on your projects.

Socialize

We're not all "social butterflies" but it's a well-known fact that socializing with good friends reduces stress. Make a special effort to make a new friend sometime soon. It may sound corny, but new friendships often add spice to life.

Once a week

What do you have a passion for? Is it arts, sciences, sport or something wacky? Whatever it is, try your upmost to make it happen once a week, every week. Tell yourself "this is the one time in the week that it's my time" – then stick to it. You'll find it incredibly rewarding. In fact, you'll start looking forward to that activity each week because you know you'll have fun doing it.

Once a day

In addition to the "once a week" activity above, kick off a "once a day" activity as well. Make it something small to ensure you find the time to do it. It could be spending ten minutes reading a magazine, going for a walk or calling a friend. As long as it's enjoyable, then make it a regular time in your daily schedule. This is the hardest tip of all to stick to, but the most beneficial in the long run. If you're serious about your work/life balance, then you will be able to find ten minutes every day to do this. Oh, and remember to make it fun!

Find a peer

Nothing beats having a peer to do this with you. Find someone who wants to get the same out of life. Open up to them and tell them what you want to achieve. Then work together to motivate each other to achieve the personal goals you set.

Meet every couple of weeks to talk about what you've struggled with and what you've achieved. Advise each other on what you could be doing differently to create the perfect work/life balance for each of you.

Someone to support you can make a real difference in your life, and you can make a real difference in theirs. Choose your peer wisely and work together to achieve your joint goals.

GET ONLINE

Fifteen years the workplace looked very different. Today, more and more transactions are done online and we spend more time there socializing, working and hanging out with friends, family and colleagues.

Online tools make it easy to balance the needs of work and home because you can access your project management data and systems from anywhere.

Get a free trial of ProjectManager.com today and see how much of a difference online working makes to your work/life balance.

Rewards

While peers can motivate you, true motivation comes from within. Set yourself a reward for achieving your goals. The reward doesn't need to cost a lot, for instance it might be taking two days off work to spend with your family. The most important thing is that the reward is something that means a lot to you and is worth working towards.

Feeling proud

If you can achieve your goals or even get half way there, then feel proud about having done it. It takes a lot of effort to make a change in your life so feel proud about what you've achieved. This sense of pride will show in your work and your personal life. And guess what? You'll have gained new enjoyment from life, so it has to be good.

Further reading: Stay on top of your project so you can get home on time. Get my free ebook: Step by Step Project Planning

Being good at time management can really help you stay focused on work during work time and on your personal life when the working day is over. Here are some resources to help you improve your time management.

1. Boost your productivity with these 7 quick tips for good time management.
2. Do you waste time? This video will uncover 9 time wasters to avoid.
3. Learn how to manage time on projects in this video.
4. Read more about how to create a realistic schedule.

Invest in continuous professional development

Have you heard the phrase, "You learn something new every day?"

The best project managers are constantly learning new things to improve the way that they manage projects. To become the best project manager that you can be you should invest in continuous professional development and carry on learning about project management skills.

Don't take it for granted that you know everything about managing projects. Things are constantly changing; the culture of organizations, technology and the economy to mention a few. With all this change happening, you need to continue learning how to adapt to it and how to apply the latest techniques to managing projects successfully.

Get serious

Whether you're a beginner or an expert, invest in formal training to boost your skills. So get serious and take the first step. Either enrol in a formal training course or use learning tools so that you can learn from home when it suits you. Set aside two hours every week to sit down and read books, articles and blogs about projects. By immersing yourself in the topic, you will spark ideas for your own projects that you can use to improve your success.

Widen your scope

Don't just stick to the classical theory of project management. Instead, widen your scope by participating in discussion groups online that also cover managing people, money and equipment, as well as suppliers, procurement and communications.

Write it down

If you're reading late at night, much of what you read will go in one ear and out the other. So every time you think, "That's a good point!" write it down. Create your own learning guidebook and record every tip that you've learned along the way. Then you can read your own guidebook as a refresher. Even better, you can use it to share the knowledge you've gained to your team. Who knows, you could even publish it as a book!

15 RESOURCES TO BUILD YOUR CAREER

1. Videos
2. Twitter: search for #pmot
3. Books and ebooks
4. Conferences
5. Magazines
6. Websites
7. Your mentor
8. Blogs
9. Your PMO library
10. Your manager
11. Project management templates
12. Webinars
13. Seminars
14. Networking events
15. Your local PMI Chapter

Get specific

When you've spent a couple of months improving your knowledge of project management, you're ready to get specific. Write down the areas that you're weak in and get detailed materials on those topics.

Project managers are generalists: they need to know a lot about all management topics. You can't be an expert in everything but if there is a key area that you know you aren't so confident in, spend some time digging deeper into that topic.

Reward yourself

By writing down your learning along the way, you'll quickly realize how valuable that information is to you. Feel proud of what you've learnt by rewarding your own efforts. Go out for a meal with friends, buy new clothes or do something special. Rewarding your efforts will reinforce how import learning is to you and it will motivate you to continue learning more each week.

WATCH AND LEARN

Many companies, including ProjectManager.com, provide project management training videos about all aspects of managing projects and the tools and services they provide. You can learn in your own time, on any device capable of playing back video. Many of the videos available are extremely short which makes them suitable for watching on the go. If you are the kind of person who prefers to learn about project scheduling by watching someone do it than by reading a book, then videos could be an effective tool for you.

MORE RESOURCES FOR CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Find out 7 quick ways to earn Professional Development Units towards your PMI credentials.
2. Read more about how volunteering as a project manager can be rewarding.
3. Check out these top 10 project management books.
4. Perhaps you can develop by helping others? Learn about becoming a project management mentor.
5. Watch this video on how to get certified as a project manager.

You can do it!

Becoming a great project manager is no easy task – if it was we wouldn't see so many stories about failed projects in the media. Great project managers need time, patience, experience and the right approach. By following the tips and ideas outlined in this eBook, I hope I've pointed you in the right direction.

Just to recap, to become a great project manager you need to:

- set very clear goals
- create plans to achieve them.
- perform at a high level
- improve your decision-making
- produce professional written documentation
- hone your presentation skills
- manage your day-to-day tasks
- develop a work/life balance that works for you
- continue to learn new skills
- give yourself a confidence boost to ensure you're always performing to the best of your abilities.

If you can do all of this while delivering your project and achieving a work/life balance at the same time, you're well on the way to becoming a great project manager.

ACT LIKE A PROFESSIONAL PROJECT MANAGER

Leverage the power of project management software. Create plans today with your 30 day free trial

Stay connected to other professionals and join the largest PM - curated community on LinkedIn

Continue to grow your knowledge with our free resources

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason Westland, Founder & CEO of ProjectManager.com

With 20 years experience managing large projects including a $1b project for British Rail in the UK, Jason went on to build Method123 and MPMM.com, the leading toolsets in the PM templates and methodology industry. After being acquired by a US Consulting Company, Jason founded ProjectManager.com in 2008. He is the author of the best-selling book "The Project Management Life Cycle" and writes for Computerworld and CIO Magazine.

Jason lives with his family in Texas, USA.

ABOUT PROJECTMANAGER

ProjectManager.com is a leading software-as-a-service provider of award-winning project management software. ProjectManager.com is unique because it allows users to see the progress of their projects visually through real-time charts, dashboards and reports online. It's an easy-to-use enterprise solution that scales for small teams through to large international businesses. ProjectManager.com has a broad range of clients from single user accounts to high profile customers including NASA, the United Nations and Siemens.

Founded in 2008, ProjectManager.com is now used by over 300,000 people in 100 countries.

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