



Here is an example of some of the vast content on our Learning Academy. This is from the top tips section, offering information/reminders for managers that need some quick advice. To find out more about Academy, call Anne Henderson on 0207 18 300 81.

Top Ten Tips for Project Management

By Tim Woodman

A project is a discrete, self-contained package of work with clearly defined goals, timescales, milestones, resources, budgets and a management team. There is no such thing as an 'on-going' project – unless it is failing! The Top Ten Tips listed here are critical to the success of all projects and can ensure successful, on-time, in-budget, completion.

- 1. Think first – Do second**

If you don't have even a semblance of a plan then you will have sown the seeds of failure before you even start. Always make the time and space to produce a plan.
- 2. Why, What and How?**

Talk to the project initiator/sponsor and understand why the project is being commissioned. This will give you context and reference bases for decision making. Put some boundaries around what you are going to do or not do and agree with your sponsor(s) that this is just the starting point and then plan how you are going to achieve this.
- 3. Calculate the end deadline**

There is always a sequence of events that happen in any project. Almost always there is more than one sequence happening at the same time. Work out which of the sequences takes the longest to give you your end deadline. Don't forget to add some contingency and then present your logical findings to your sponsor for approval/agreement/negotiation. The logic of your thinking should override wishful deadlines from your sponsor(s).
- 4. Plan your first steps in detail**

The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first steps. Just because this is a cliché, it doesn't mean it is untrue. So help your team start their journey by planning with them the first steps through to the visible horizon. The visible horizon is that point in time up to which you can predict with reasonable certainty that the project environment, goals etc, will not change.
- 5. Involve everyone in the customer chain**

In my past I was in charge of building a Type 42 destroyer and I involved the customer, MOD sailors, every day in ensuring that what we were building was fit for purpose. It's no good if it didn't work in combat situations. Plan where and when the involvement will take place and agree the schedule with everyone –even if it is difficult!

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6. Plan your communications

Many projects fail because communications are not planned and when things go wrong, people start to blame each other. Identify who are the key people to the project across the spectrum of customers, users, sponsors, line managers, team members, influencers, finance, etc and plan and agree what and how you will communicate with them and how often.

7. Prioritise and plan your own time

Some things are critical to your project, like meeting your deadlines. So identify those tasks that have a direct impact on the end deadline. (Critical path analysis can do this for you). Then apportion your working day appropriately to tightly control these tasks and loosely control the others. Look for symptoms of success or failure and manage them.

8. Manage the risks

Identify the events that could have any negative consequence for your project, determine their probability of happening and the impact on your project if they do.

- if it is low risk then track the trends
- if it is middle risk then set aside some contingency of time and/or money
- if it is high risk then have plans made up and ready to counter the risk

9. Be an effective project manager

So MANAGE! Don't get drawn into doing technical tasks. Good effective project managers plan, organise the activities, lead, motivate, communicate, monitor and then act on this information. They work with the natural chaos which can be the activity of a project to guide and direct everyone and everything in order to meet the project goals that have been set and inevitably get modified.

10. Inspect - don't expect

If you inspect, things are more likely to get done - though this is easier said than done. Skilful inspection leaves team members motivated and encouraged to perform and not feeling put upon, hovered over or micro managed.

Tim Woodman is MD of Management Learning and Coaching. Tim specialises in project management, general management, sales and customer care. He has been running project management learning initiatives for 10 years. Earlier in his career he managed teams working on projects in engineering, manufacturing, sales and marketing. He trains project managers, project teams and project sponsors.