



Rescuing a Small Project

By Jeri Merrell

Recently I was asked to jump in and rescue a small infrastructure project that was headed for disaster.

What did I do?

1. Assessed the project objectives & current status
2. Identified the current project team members
3. Discovered the project's major issues - and any major critical deliverables that were behind schedule
4. Determined who needed to be added (or removed) from project team
5. Got the team talking, regularly and frequently!
6. Attacked the most important issues and most critically behind challenges first
7. Quickly and honestly reset any customer expectations, if necessary
8. Communicated regularly and directly with the team and with project stakeholders



Of this process, there were really two critical success factors.

First, I needed to push the long lead time items that had been missed, getting them in motion with expedited speed and escalated priority. In this case, that was circuit orders and equipment budget approval and orders.

Second, we needed to start communicating. The team wasn't talking amongst itself, no one was talking to the customer and vendors, and it was killing the initiative. Establishing a project team e-mail chain, twice-weekly brief status & problem solving meetings and customer-focused status summaries made a huge amount of difference! The team grew to understand the big picture and was more productive with group accountability for their deliverables.

There's a fine line that a project manager must walk with customer communication. On one hand, I believe in honesty and transparency related to project status. On the other hand, I feel that alerting your customer every time there is an issue can be counterproductive, it creates a Chicken Little "the sky is falling" mentality. My choice is to maintain issues documentation that customers can review if they choose to - but I only alert them of the issues that have a high probability of impacting the end result - time, scope, quality or budget.

Was the rescue effort successful? The project is still unfolding, it's due to wrap up at the end of the month. At this point, it seems to be back on track, with all planned components scheduled to complete on time. The customer is happy with progress and the project team members are pleased to be part of the effort.

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