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Managing Stakeholder Expectations

By James T. Brown, PhD., P.E., PMP

Successful project managers know that success goes beyond the triple constraint deliverables to include managing stakeholder expectations.

Three aspects of managing stakeholder expectations are:

1. Know your stakeholders
2. Know what you are supposed to deliver from the perspective of the stakeholder
3. Hold your stakeholders accountable to the realities of the project

#1. Know your stakeholders.

First, identify all stakeholders. The customer is obviously a stakeholder, but good stakeholder management also includes team members, suppliers and leadership. **Here is a checklist to identify stakeholders.**

- > Who is paying for the project?
- > Who will receive savings or pay additional costs?
- > Who provides resources to the project such as labor, facilities, services and equipment?
- > Who is the recipient of the product or service, at any level?

Additionally, ask team members, customers and any other confirmed stakeholder to help you identify additional stakeholders.

Once stakeholders are identified, analyze them. Know their likes and dislikes, especially when it comes to communication. Understand how you, and others, can leverage stakeholders' support for or against the project.

#2. Know what you are supposed to deliver from the perspective of the stakeholder.

Ensure that you understand the objectives from the stakeholders' perspectives. Do not communicate objectives in highly technical terminology — communicate with words the stakeholders would use to describe their objectives. Depending on the stakeholder, this may or may not include technical jargon.

Stakeholders' expectations often increase, or are perceived to increase, because they were not adequately defined or understood upfront. Writing down expectations is necessary to understand them. **If they are not written down, there is no understanding.**

As project manager, do your team members understand your expectations? Is the customer's expectation of the project understood? This need for understanding refers not just to the deliverable, but includes all of the interaction that takes place during all phases of the project.

As project requirements are baselined (are signed off and agreed upon), it is important to baseline stakeholder expectations. **If expectations are not documented, expect pressure to increase.**

#3. Hold your stakeholder accountable to the realities of the project.

As change occurs, and it will, make sure your stakeholders are aware of the risks and the consequences. Make sure they don't expect something for nothing, or more than was defined when expectations were baselined. Some stakeholders are oblivious to the fact that a cut in budget or a reduced schedule can mean that the scope originally planned may not be delivered.



The topics covered in this article were recommended by readers from the Asia Pacific and North America regions.

As project manager, even if you are at lower level than your stakeholders, you must lead them and hold them accountable to reality. It is important to **use data to demonstrate reality** to stakeholders. You must find a way to communicate the circumstances that allow you to set or reset expectations to what can actually be achieved. This means not yielding to unrealistic expectations.

When you are the project manager, stakeholders expect you to lead. And leading means you must manage expectations even if the stakeholders are more powerful than you are. The three steps above will help ensure positive outcomes from stakeholders, regardless of their power level.



Dr. James T. Brown is president of a project management training company, [SEBA Solutions Inc.](#), and of a Web-based provider of Professional Development Units (PDUs) for PMI credential holders, [OnePdu.com](#). He is a keynote speaker on project management topics. Please send your questions or comments to [Dr. Brown](#).

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