The Art of Stakeholder Management

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Dr. Brown has spoken to audiences from Anchorage Alaska to Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur. He is a Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) by the National Speakers Association. Less than 10% of professional speakers worldwide have the Certified Speaking Professional designation. It is the highest earned designation in the speaking industry. Participants say his use of stories and humor bring critical truths to light, in an entertaining way that leaves them motivated to take action. He provides brilliant bluntness on real world, common sense practices for project management and leadership. An IBM executive stated after Dr. Brown’s keynote speech “If we all took the time to step back and remember what Dr. Brown taught us, we would be unstoppable in the marketplace.”

Dr. Brown has run his own company, SEBA® Solutions, for over fifteen years. He had a career at NASA that included "hands on" experience as a team member, project manager and serving in executive level organizational leadership roles. He has a patent for a project scheduling methodology, and has received numerous awards including "Engineer of the Year" from the Cape Canaveral Technical Societies and is a recipient of the "NASA Public Service Medal" for exceptional contributions to NASA’s mission. He has a Ph.D. in Industrial Engineering from the University of Central Florida, a MS in Engineering Management from Florida Institute of Technology and a BS in Electrical Engineering from Tennessee State University. He is a licensed Professional Engineer (PE), a certified Project Management Professional (PMP).

Dr. Brown is the author of The Handbook of Program Management published by McGraw-Hill. He has also been published in the PMI Community Post, PM Network, PE Magazine, and many other periodicals. His online video based training courses have been used by companies large and small and provide actionable takeaways with a minimum time investment for participants.

James is the son of a career Marine and was born in Beaufort, South Carolina. He grew up under strong discipline. He believes in the values of hard work, preparation and persistence. James is married and the proud father of two sons. He resides in central Florida with his wife Vanessa. An avid surf fisherman, his favorite activity is catch and release fishing for Roosterfish on the beaches of Mexico.

A fun, thought provoking experience will be had by all, with everyone leaving motivated to improve themselves and the organization, as well as being armed with tools to make it happen.
The strength of my stakeholder relationships is …

1. Super strong
2. Strong
3. Adequate
4. Weak
5. What stakeholders?

Stakeholder Management

• Stakeholder satisfaction is more than the quality of the deliverable.
  – The physical characteristics of the deliverable must be managed.
  – The stakeholder’s perception of the deliverable must also be managed.
Book Review

Writing Better Requirements by Ian F. Alexander and Richard Stevens

Dr. James T. Brown PMP PE CSP

It is rare when you come across a project management book that is easy to read, short and full of valuable information but Writing Better Requirements meets this criteria. If you have been in my training or heard me speak you know I like simple and to the point!

The Book Provides Practical Advice

The book provides good practical advice on writing requirements. Alexander and Stevens follow their own advice for writing requirements in the book by using simple words that contribute to the books readability. The book is written in a manner that will not intimidate non-technical personnel so it may given to the entire project team, including customers and users. (Wait..... I just had a novel idea….we should our teach customers and users how to write requirements.)

Here are five valuable tips from Writing Better Requirements

1. Perspective on the requirements effort. The authors state approximately 5% of the project effort and up to 25% of the schedule duration should be put on project requirements.

2. Guidance on structuring requirements. Improper structuring is identified as a primary cause of poor requirements. The structuring discussion includes a useful table that documents problems and solutions for structuring requirements. For, example, the authors characterize one problem as “Some requirements can be applied simultaneously or in any order” and provide the common sense solution of “Mark whether sections in the structure are sequences, parallels or alternatives.” Overall the authors provide some good alternatives to challenges on how to effectively structure requirements.

3. Plenty of exercises. Another valuable aspect of this book are the exercises provided after a lot of the sections in the book. The exercises provided are well thought out and solutions are included at the end of the book. In addition to the exercises examples are provided to clarify and reinforce key points.

4. Guidelines on conducting a requirements workshop. Important guidelines on how to conduct a requirements workshop are discussed including room lay out and facilitation tips. The book has a good glossary of terms.

5. Lists of other sources of requirements. The book includes a nice list of “other” sources of requirements. One of these sources that is often overlooked is problem reports from the previous system. The authors state these problem reports “can often be turned around into requirements.” This is a powerful method to ensure improvement of the future system.

Writing Better Requirements (ISBN 0321131630) should be a part of every project managers library. I give it 5 of 5 stars!
Stakeholder Management continued

• Assess stakeholder power.
• Handle the problem stakeholder.
• Build relationships with and between stakeholders.

Stakeholder Identification

“Hell hath no fury like a stakeholder scorned.”
James Brown
Busy, but not important work – the consequences

Dr. James T. Brown PMP PE CSP

I had just arrived in Antwerp Belgium for a client engagement and decided to go to the Starbucks at the Antwerp Central railway station. Antwerp Central is a busy railway station and so is the Starbucks. The place was packed and the early morning customers were squeezing in the door. A Starbucks barista was taking our order about ten yards ahead of the register to expedite the preparation of our drinks. I had my Starbucks Americano with an extra shot in less than seven minutes. *Despite the large number of orders, the Starbucks crew was a well oiled machine behind the counter and there was the constant call of customer names as their drinks were ready.*

In an attempt to stay awake as I adjusted for the time difference between Europe and the United States, I returned to the Starbucks in the afternoon to find no line and walked directly to the register. Placed my Americano order and went to the other end of the counter. What I now observed was a lot of complaining from the baristas that were behind the counter. Two baristas were going at it about one of the machines and then the manager stepped in and all three were arguing, arm waving and one was even foot stomping. Instead of just a coffee, I received coffee and a show. The time to get my drink was much longer than when the place was packed. Slower service, with fewer customers! This experience illustrates a truth I have observed in large and small companies which is:

**As important work decreases, complaining, politicking and bickering increases!**

People just seem to get along better when they are performing important work. As soon as the amount of important work decreases then strife shows up. If there is a lot of complaining and infighting in an organization, the leader needs to examine:

1. The relative value of the work the organization is producing
2. The effectiveness of the communication of the relative value of the work

Please note that an organization can be very busy and still have complaining, politicking and bickering, because there is a difference between busy and doing important work that adds value.

Many busy organizations produce very little value relative to organizational goals and/or productive goals. When people know (or do not believe) their work is important, there focus fades and they can become overly concerned with every trivial thing they find irritating about the job/boss/company. (In Marshall Goldsmith's book Mojo, it states the average American spends 15 hours a month criticizing or complaining about their boss.)

When some organizations have a lot of infighting and strife leadership often immediately looks at personalities or organizational structure. Personalities and organizational structure may only be a symptom, that simply manifests itself when there is not enough important work to keep those problems dormant. Although it is a basic premise for leaders to assure an organization’s employees are working on what is important and communicating that importance, sometimes the speed of business, the "do more with less mantras" and poor decision making combine to throw the basics out the window.

**Regardless of your level of leadership, always understand the importance of the work relative to the organizational goals and continually communicate this importance to the team.** Importance and purpose can easily be loss in the dynamic work environment where people play multiple roles and deal with constant change on a number of fronts.

Thomas Edison summarized the role of the leader well in this circumstance with this quote “Being busy does not always mean real work. The object of all work is production or accomplishment and to either of these ends there must be forethought, system, planning, intelligence, and honest purpose, as well as perspiration. *Seeming to do is not doing.*”
Stakeholder Identification continued

• Follow the money!
  – Whoever is…
    • Paying.
    • Saving.
    • Costs increases.
  – Follow the resources
    • Every entity that provides resources…
      – Internal.
      – External.

Stakeholder Identification continued

• Follow the deliverables.
  – Whoever is the recipient of the product or service
• Follow the signatures.
  – The individual who signs off on completion (or phases) of the deliverable
• Examine other projects’ stakeholder lists.
October 24, 2013

Dr. James T. Brown
3205 South Washington Ave
Unit 703B
Titusville, FL 3280,

Dear James,

You did a fabulous job at our recent Project Management Forum at Boston Scientific. Your practical common sense approach to the discipline of project management was met by the participants as engaging, refreshing and knowledgeable with great stories. You were also generous with your time before and after you spoke, taking the time to interact with the participants and doing your best to “get to know” your audience. I would highly recommend you to any company and am thankful I personally had the opportunity to work with you.

Sincerely,

David M. Bee
Vice President, Global Technology
Boston Scientific, Inc.
Stakeholder Identification continued

• Review the organizational chart
• Ask team members, customers, and any other confirmed stakeholder
• Look for the “Unofficial People of Influence!”

I meet with all stakeholders at the start of the project and look them in the eye (or monitor) to set expectations

1. Absolutely True
2. Just the “important” ones
3. Not really

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Milestones in Mirror are Closer Than They Appear

Dr. James T. Brown PMP PE CSP

At the beginning of the calendar year, a common conversational topic is “how fast time passes.” No one has an appreciation for how fast time passes more than a project manager with a tight schedule. Milestones that seemed far away when the project started seem to be accelerating towards you. Because we tend to immediately forget past accomplishments and their significance, milestones that have been completed seem like ancient history.

You can take a breath to acknowledge achievements!

Always take the opportunity to remind yourself and the team of accomplishments, challenges overcome and milestones completed. Take some time to celebrate and acknowledge achievement of the milestone. This helps to build confidence and serves to relieve the seemingly constant pressure of the next project milestone.

Schedule pre-milestone reviews!

You will find it valuable to schedule pre-milestone reviews ahead of the milestone to ensure there are no surprises or hidden issues that may prevent achievement of the milestone. These reviews are typically scheduled two to four weeks in front of the milestone completion date. The situation may dictate a formal team review or you may informally meet individually with team members. By putting this on the schedule it minimizes the “nagging” perception when you follow up…just like a good “nagging” project manager should.

2009 to 2010 is a big milestone!

Some say the holiday season is depressing. Could it be depressing for some because it is a time of assessment? The change over of the calendar, from one year to another, even though it is just another day, causes people to assess themselves. This assessment is good for them and for those companies that sell fitness equipment.

So…just in case you haven’t explicitly asked yourself, “How well did you do as a project manager or team member this year?” Evaluate how well you did: 1. From your own internal feelings; 2. From metrics and 3. By asking your key stakeholders. Analyze the variance among these three indicators. If you don’t have metrics to assess your performance, have them for next year.

Commit to get better!

- Were you a better project manager/team member in 2009 than you were in 2008?
- Was your organization better at project management in 2009 than 2008?
- What goal or capability do you have in 2009 that you didn’t have in 2008?

I challenge you to set goals to achieve in 2010 related to the questions above. Answer the questions ahead of time! Remember in project management, requirements that are not written down are not really requirements and certainly not managed properly. The same applies for goals! If you do not take the time to visualize your goal and write it down, you are limiting (more likely eliminating) your ability to achieve it.
Know Your Stakeholders Pets

• Pet peeves…pet projects…pet people:
  – All stakeholders usually have one or more
  – Find out
    • What your stakeholders’ biggest pains and worries
    • How their performance is judged.
    • What makes the stakeholder’s customer or boss say the equivalent of ‘good job’ to the stakeholder?”

Stakeholder Communication

• Regular and planned
  – Define upfront
• Not just bad news
  – Take every opportunity to communicate success
    • Good news via email → okay
    • Bad news via email → NOT okay
Project Management Tactics for TBD -
To Be Determined

Dr. James T. Brown PMP PE CSP

Project management is filled with uncertainties and unknowns. All of these unknowns cannot and should not be immediately resolved. Therefore the term To Be Determined (TBD) can be a common part of the Project Management landscape. Additionally, blanket requests or expectations for detail from project teams are counterproductive. Use of detail should be a strategic decision to make sure the team is not overwhelmed providing information that may be of little use. One of the ways to control excessive detail is the effective use of TBD.

It is simply common sense as program or project manager for you to have rules for TBD use by your team. There is nothing wrong with TBD as long as the TBD is not lonely and TBD is time constrained.

TBD should never be lonely

A lonely TBD in the project environment is reckless endangerment with dire project management consequences likely. This means when I have a TBD in order for it not to be lonely there is an associated individual that is responsible for resolving the TBD and a date as to when that resolution is required. These TBD’s should also be tracked in an issues list or an action item list.

So the minimum rules you as project manager should have for every TBD are to…

1. Have individual accountability for the TBD

2. Have a due date for the elimination or the clarification of the TBD

3. Have an action item list or tracking lists for TBD’s to assure on time resolution

This is just sound management practice and allowing TBD’s frees team members from getting bogged down unnecessarily. You do not want to have the team investing a lot of time in something when the value added may be marginal, non-existent or it can be easier done at a later date. Leaders pave the way for people to be successful and proper application of “To Be Determined” is one of the things that puts individuals and teams in a position to be successful.
Stakeholder Listening Tips

• Listen through the noise.
• Distinguish between requirements and solutions.
• Understanding is not always improved by talking to more people.
  – Who are the right people?

Assessing Stakeholder Power

• You should know the limits of their power.
  – How much they can hurt you and how much they can help you.
  – Assess their history for using that power.
  – Know what type of power each stakeholder has. Is it positional, influence, expert, charismatic, etc?
The Seven Gym Personalities You Must Deal with at Work

Dr. James T. Brown PMP PE CSP

As I climb endlessly on the stairmaster at Planet Fitness it is interesting to observe the seven "gym personalities" that also show up in the work environment and must be dealt with. The personalities are:

1. **The Talker.** The talker does very little exercise because they use the gym as a social experience and are constantly chit chatting with anyone who will listen. The talker is in the work environment and seems to find time to discuss every current political, personal or pop culture issue with co-workers, but never seems to have time to get their work done on schedule.

2. **The Slacker.** The slacker does an exercise and then spends five minutes texting or looking at their phone before they go and do another exercise. Slackers in the work environment lose focus and tend to have a hard time doing what's important but appear to stay very busy with the trivial and have no idea that IT can actually track their time on Facebook and ebay.

3. **The Sloppy.** The sloppy gym member sweats all over everything and then doesn't clean up after themselves leaving it for the next person. Sloppy people at work create work for anyone else that has to follow behind them because they haven't done a thorough and complete job and someone else has to tie up all the lose ends before proceeding further.

4. **The Show Off.** Show off's have to let everyone know how strong they are by prancing around before lifting weights or by loud grunting or dropping the weights to make lots of noise to attract attention. Show off's in the work environment want everyone to know they are "the smartest" or working on the most critical aspects of the project and use every opportunity to let everyone know what they have done and how they have saved the day.

5. **The Clueless.** The clueless person knows nothing about lifting weights or the cardio machines and just starts doing stuff endangering themselves and others. Clueless people at work often accept and/or are assigned work they are not capable of doing and then combine this error without asking enough questions before proceeding and therefore create all kinds of havoc.

6. **The Self Absorbed.** Self absorbed people in the gym can't lift weights unless they are looking at themselves in the mirror. They position the bench and weights so they have an unobstructed view of themselves and when it is time to exercise their other arm they turn around so they can see that side of themselves in the mirror. Self absorbed people at work only care about the overall project or organization as it relates specifically to what they are doing. They have to see their tasks in the status report and hear their work discussed otherwise they don't contribute.

7. **The Blocker.** The blocker is the person who starts exercising right in front of the weight rack blocking access to the weights to others or chooses to stretch in places that limit the access of others or they tie up multiple machines at once. Blockers in the work environment don't think about the ramifications of their actions as it relates to the ability of others to accomplish their work. They are often surprised and then apologetic when they realize their actions was holding others back.
Problem Stakeholders

- Chances are high that you will at some point have one or a few problem stakeholders in the mix.
- Problem stakeholders come in a variety of flavors, including the following:
  - The meddling stakeholder.
  - The overbearing stakeholder.
  - The poor stakeholder.
  - The untrustworthy stakeholder.
  - The indecisive stakeholder.
  - The unavailable stakeholder.

The problem stakeholder I deal with the most is

1. Meddling 100%
2. Overbearing 90%
3. Poor 80%
4. Untrustworthy 70%
5. Indecisive 60%
6. Unavailable 50%
7. I need a new job*** 40%

*** My stakeholder is an indecisive, poor, meddling, untrustworthy, overbearing person that is unavailable.
The Truth About Work-Life Balance

Dr. James T. Brown PMP PE CSP

Odds are high that if you are in an office environment, supporting demanding projects, you don’t have to walk past seven cubicles before you will pass someone totally consumed by their job to the point their work-life balance is out of whack. There is also the probability you may see this person when you look in the mirror. Regrettably, over the course of my career I have been this person.

Two keys to maintain work-life balance in order of importance:

1. Get a Life!
2. Delegate!

1. Get a Life! I worked for a NASA executive who had struggled with work-life balance to the point that he sought counseling because he was unable to stop thinking about work. After talking to him about his interests, the counselor’s prescription was for him to “build an airplane,” despite the fact that he had not actually flown an airplane in years. Building an airplane to him was so exciting that it put work in perspective and he no longer thought about his work challenges 24/7. He had an airplane to build.

What happy, life activities do you: A. have; B. enjoy and C. actually do that puts work in its proper perspective?

If you cannot answer this quickly and find yourself doing or thinking about work more than you should you may be a “get a life” candidate.

Recently I had the opportunity to sit down with Space Shuttle Launch director Mike Leinbach a few weeks after the landing of the final Space Shuttle mission. Mike has been launch director since 2000 for 37 launches. Here is an excerpt from my interview with Mike:

James: How do you balance the demands of being Launch Director with family? You have a job that you could spend 100 hours a week here and still feel like “I need to spend more time.” How do you keep that work-family life balance?

Mike: That’s a great question… my wife and I have been married 32 years now, so something must be going right. [laughs] We live on a little farm north of the base, up in Scottsmoor. When I do leave, I’m able to put this place behind me…. I just enjoy getting away. I enjoy work around the farm. I like playing golf. The family never had any kids but we have over the years have had a slew of different kinds of animals. Now my wife is into golden retrievers and agility training through the AKC. She has a dog that’s going to be a champion so I enjoy seeing her excel at that. I’m taking trash out, I’m mowing the grass, I’m fixing a fence, playing with the dogs… this job could be consuming and I’ve found ways of making it not consuming. I think that’s good for my mental health. I know it’s good for my wife. Because it could be overpowering.

Newsflash!!! - If the launch director for the Space Shuttle Program can put his work behind him when he goes home so can you.

2. Delegate! - The second part of Mike’s answer and ability to maintain work-life balance dealt with delegation… his response continues below:

Mike: … a lot of the ways you deal with that, of course, is true delegation. A lot of people talk about delegation, it’s another thing to truly do it. Give people the authority and responsibility and expect them to come through and do the job that they’re given. Guidance – give them guidance of course and give them help when they ask. I’m a real believer in letting a guy make a mistake and let that individual learn from that mistake. I’ve done that on console, I’ve done that in the firing room. I’ve done it – especially through the training sessions in the firing room. You recognize that they’re heading the wrong direction but that’s OK, let them go until they get to the point where you have to course correct. Making a mistake and learning from it is a powerful, powerful tool. The last thing that I ever wanted growing up, either at home or professionally, is someone telling me what to do all the time. You hear a lot about micromanaging – it’s a buzz word – and all that is is the lack of true delegation. Delegation is very, very powerful. Everyone appreciates it.

The work-life balance paradox

Overworked people make more mistakes and find poorer solutions to problems. Some of these problems were the direct result of them or the team being overworked. Their solution to address these problems is often to work longer hours. Because we are less productive we are tempted to work longer and when we work longer we are even less productive… and the cycle continues. Break the cycle, establish a good work-life balance by getting a life and delegating more. You and those around you will actually be more effective, more productive and happier.

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The Meddlig Stakeholder

• The meddlig stakeholder is always inserting himself or herself unnecessarily into…
  – Decisions
  – Processes
  – Meetings

The Meddlig Stakeholder
continued

• Develop “rules of engagement” with all stakeholders, including meddlig ones.
  – These rules of engagement may be written or verbal
  – Document how often and what format routine communication will take place for the stakeholder
"Brown's book captures the essential skills of program and project management. It serves as a "how to" guide for those entering the business, as well as a refresher on the skills and attributes for those ready to take the next step. The book effectively defines the leader's role in creating the team culture and environment for success". - Eugene F. Kranz, Apollo 13 Flight Director, Retired Director NASA Space Operations, Author - Failure is not an Option

Why this book will make you a better program manager, project manager and leader of teams!

“The book proved to be a very quick read and loaded with excellent insight into Program Management. The section on Stakeholder management was especially interesting. Dr. Brown describes a ranking system and communication techniques that are extremely helpful. Risk management is also a section that has good approaches for managing a successful program.” Greg Maloney

“The book takes you step-by-step through the basics of setting up the structure necessary for a robust program environment. Where needed, examples and pointers are included, with tips and scenarios throughout the chapters, and the essence of each chapter is boiled down to a useful list of "Keystone" principles at its close.”

...This book was better than a handbook, at least how I think of handbooks. It read very well (unlike my stereotype of a handbook which a choppy, reference guide) and was full of "gems" from real example projects and programs. The other word is "Program". While it's of course true that the book focuses on Program Management, my issue is that it is an excellent book for Project Managers, as well. - Rich Maltzman

“The chapter that covered stakeholder management was another excellent chapter that I have since asked all of my Program AND Project managers to read. I did this because it's an excellent chapter on helping the Program and Project Managers to understand what stakeholders REALLY expect of them. Additionally he goes over the types of stakeholders that you can run into and simple yet effective methods to work effectively with”

“The book is a very useful and pragmatic approach to Program Management. Dr. Brown provides real world examples and guidance for improving your skills. He also does a great job addressing the leadership skills required to be a successful program manager. A highly recommended read for program managers and those aspiring to be one!” Joe Savage

If you are a program manager, or thinking of becoming one, you will want this book. Dr. Brown shares his wisdom on the program management without overburdening you with methodology. In reading the book, I often felt like I was having a discussion about program management with a knowledgeable and experienced colleague. J. F. Simmel
The Meddling Stakeholder continued

• Assess the cause for the stakeholder meddling
• Listen to the meddling stakeholder to ascertain whether his or her experience may help in any way.
• Assess, strategize, and then engage

The Overbearing Stakeholder

• An overbearing stakeholder, because of their power position or personality, can be domineering and put the program at risk
• Seek help with an overbearing stakeholder.
• Make sure the overbearing stakeholder doesn’t ruin other project relationships or teamwork
Have you suffered from Project Failure due to being victim of a “Bait Project”?  

Dr. James T. Brown PMP PE CSP

There is a popular reality TV show called *Bait Car*. In this show the police leave a nice car on the street with the keys in it, tempting an unsuspecting robber to jump in and steal it. The police then lock them in the car and take them to jail.

In *Bait Car* the victim goes to jail. On a "*Bait Project*" the project manager suffers unnecessarily on a project that is likely predestined for project failure.

The generic scenario for the “*Bait Car,*” that sometimes happens to a Project Manager (PM) in a “*Bait Project*” situation is…

1. The victim/PM is presented a "great opportunity" and has initial excitement  
2. The victim/PM then gets an inkling or feeling that all is not as it seems  
3. This inkling then turns into knowing and a sense of being locked in with no escape  
4. The same people/Stakeholders that set up the victim/PM then ask the victim/PM with a straight face "what happened"

**Here are the common statements from sponsors that may clue you in that you are being offered/assigned a “Bait Project”**

- This project may require long hours but that is only short term...
- You will get to keep your other responsibilities also, but the stakeholders will be understanding if there are delays...
- The critical team members will be on board soon...
- The budget authorization should happen shortly but we would like you to proceed...
- The customer is still not exactly sure what is required...
- The completion date has been set but there is plenty of flexibility...
- Even though this is a global project, travel requirements are minimal...
- You have our full support as this project has the highest visibility...
The Poor Stakeholder

• A poor stakeholder is someone who has interests or is impacted by the program, but who has no significant budget or budget authority

• Poor stakeholders may play politics in order to gain influence

• Do not ignore the poor stakeholder

The Poor Stakeholder continued

• Understanding of how the objectives of the poor stakeholder line up or conflict with more powerful stakeholders
  – This can be a predictor of future issues
  – This can allow you to leverage opportunities
Natural Accountability Generation

Dr. James T. Brown PMP

A lot of team members and support personnel for projects think that the project manager is a nag. The project manager must walk a fine line between following up and micro managing to assure there will not be a problem with deliverables.

If you were forced to pick an end of the spectrum between being a nag and a totally hands off project manager you should choose nag. Fortunately, we have choices between the ends of the spectrum.

Why Nag?

- People sometimes hide problems.
- People sometimes are overly optimistic about what can get done in a certain amount of time.
- People tend to start working on a task later than planned and sometimes due to priorities they may neglect to work on your project deliverable at all.

The problems above are amplified because often when they occur people don’t tell you about it or tell you about it too late. As a project manager you must stay informed and this means following up (you must nag to a degree.)

Here’s a tip… tell team members up front that you are going to follow up. Tell them it is not personal… but necessary for a project like this. (A project like this can be large or small, critical or not critical, internal or external, i.e. any and every project) Tell them you will follow up generally based on the following NAG Schedule.

Natural Accountability Generation (NAG) schedule

- Deliverables 3 months or more away – bi-weekly.
- Deliverables 1 to 3 months away – weekly
- Deliverables 1 week to less than a month – twice a week.
- Deliverables less than a week away – daily.

Obviously, you can and should modify the NAG schedule to the context of your project environment. (Judgment always rules) Letting people know you will do this ahead of time reduces potential resentment from the natural following up project managers require to be successful. Never forget to always be positive and friendly when following up.
The Untrustworthy Stakeholder

• The untrustworthy stakeholder will often…
  – Play “both sides”
  – Won’t stand by his or her words
  – Refuse to document anything with a signature

• No magic answer exists for how to deal with untrustworthy stakeholders
  – Fear of accountability, inexperience and/or ignorance can contribute to untrustworthiness.

The Untrustworthy Stakeholder continued

• All important communication relative to the program and projects must be documented and have traceability

• Keep a history with data (examples and impacts) of untrustworthy behavior or circumstances
  – Use the data to take proactive action
  – This may involve partnering with others
  – Proceed with caution but proceed
Here’s a quick and easy way to improve your project management capability with 10 one hour online courses!

www.SebaSolutions.com

Change Management
Again, the most excellent and usable information imaginable. These are not only intellectual guidelines to determine the course of our thinking but also provide a framework for real action in the workplace. R. Ott

Critical Chain
Fantastic! I appreciate you asking me to trust you in the beginning. I am a brand new PMP and after hearing your opening remarks my head was spinning. I decided to trust you and I am glad I did. Great information! Great presentation as well. I actually understand it! S. Anderson

Collaboration Strategies for International Conference Calls
Most companies assume project managers already know how to manage an international conference call. This course provided good information that should be used by ALL not just project managers. Very clear and concise course. S. Sawyer

Presentation Skills
This course provides great advice on presentation skills and how to handle presentations that I have never had in any other class. Very useful and practical information which will definitely improve my skills. R. Miller

Project Requirements
Packed full of useful information. I particularly liked the comment about how assessment tools serve as the input to the project managers judgment process…. PMBOK® can’t do it alone. L. Taylor

Resource Leveling
Excellent comparison of critical path, both resource leveled and not resource leveled. This course highlighted the need for resource leveling in a very graphic and eye opening way. T. Graham

Risk Identification
Dr. Brown did it again, this course should be titled risk management made easy, It also gave me the tools needed to shine in the area of risk management instead of shying away from risk identification. F. Whitfield.

Qualitative Risk Assessment
This course gave me a much better understanding of qualitative risk analysis then I previously had. K. Plaku

Stakeholder Management
An excellent tool for getting to grips with the essential elements of managing Stakeholders. It has proven to open up my mind to many more options and strategies to employ in my role. I have neglected the necessity for a game plan in this area in past. Not any more thanks to this course.. C. Payne

Technical Writing
Great information for producing clear and understandable documents that accomplish the objectives. I wish I had taken this course many years ago, and I wish the project managers who worked for me had taken it as well. Thanks for presenting these great ideas. J. Bennett

- 1 hour video based courses
- Six ten minute segments, Available online 24/7,
- Fluff free...just the information you need to be successful! Works on IPad’s! Only $49 each!
The Indecisive Stakeholder

• The indecisive stakeholder…
  – Can never make decisions in a timely manner
  – Cannot remain committed to previous decisions
• Set up processes and structures that clearly communicate when the decision is required and the impact of the decision not being made.
  – Keep a log of these consequences.
  – Establish a metric of lost time due to delayed decisions.

The Unavailable Stakeholder

• The unavailable stakeholder is always “too busy” to participate when their input or approval is required
• It is often unavailable stakeholders who end up questioning or challenging the deliverables at pivotal points when they had prior opportunities to review and provide input.
• Maintain a history of efforts and attempts made to communicate with the unavailable stakeholder.
Why you should never “Dumb It Down” for the Customer

Dr. James T. Brown PMP PE CSP

I cringed when I heard a project manager say he had to “dumb it down” for a conversation with a stakeholder. In my opinion there is no such thing as “dumbing it down.” There is only effective communication. When someone says or has the mindset of “dumbing it down” they are implying or believe a certain level of superiority. There is more to communication than words. If you have lived long enough you probably have had an encounter with someone who was “dumbing it down” when talking to you and odds are high you felt/feel negatively about that person.

I love statistics and math. A lot of people hate these subjects… usually not because they are difficult but because the teachers they had for these subjects were poor communicators… the difficulty is primarily because of the poor instruction they received. In my experience the best teachers were always the ones who could communicate their points so everyone understood.

Do your communication skills pass the 7th grader test?

If you have ever attended one of my classes you have probably heard me say “no matter how complex the idea/point is we should be able to speak or write about it at the seventh grade level.” If you cannot do that the person whose knowledge is in question is your own… because if we truly understand something we can communicate it in simple terms without leaving an impression of “dumbing it down.”

If you can’t pass the seventh grade communication test, then you need to increase your own level of understanding. Yes… when I say this I sometimes receive looks of doubt from Solution Architects, PhD engineers, PhD geologists and other highly technical people… but equal numbers of highly technical people agree with my seventh grader communication principle. The ancient African proverb “He who learns, teaches” applies here.

Communicating simply is a valuable skill!

This month I attended a conference on “Advanced Analytics” and heard Anne G. Robinson, PhD, Director, Information and Data Strategy Customer Value Chain Management for Cisco speak on how Cisco is using analytics. Anne hires PhD scientists and basically stated: “the key question when interviewing a job candidate for her group is to ask them to explain a complex subject in simple terms.” If they can’t do that they are not a strong candidate because they won’t be able to communicate effectively with the customer which is essential for success.

Strong communication is always on the customers terms!

In fact even though it was a conference focused on “Advanced Analytics,” surprisingly, most of the presenters (who were all high level leaders with technical backgrounds) talked about the importance of people relationships for success. A common failure scenario is to let the focus/euphoria of the tool/data/results overshadow the people relationships.

Effective people relationships require strong communication. Strong communication is always on the customers terms and that is not from a position of superiority. Don’t “dumb it down”…simply communicate!
The Unavailable Stakeholder continued

• Strategies for dealing with the unavailable stakeholder include:
  – Trying to get the stakeholder to delegate authority to someone capable and trustworthy who will be available.
  – Working with the stakeholder to provide a mechanism to allow the stakeholder to make decisions without having to be physically present.

• Strategies for dealing with the unavailable stakeholder include:
  – Maintaining scheduled meetings and timeframes
  – Ad Hoc meetings may be appropriate
  – Publishing stakeholder meeting schedules well in advance
    • Following up with telephone and email reminders
Knowing the Customer, Hollow Words or Real Investment?

Dr. James T. Brown PMP PE CSP

Knowing your customer and their business is essential in successful project management. This means you can communicate with contextual accuracy about the customers business. Communication with a richness beyond the simple understanding of terminology. This contextual accuracy is one of the elements that builds trust with the customer.

For exceptional performance it is not enough to be a PMP and a skilled project manager. Exceptional performance is enabled when you respect the customers perspective to the degree you have made a significant investment in establishing and maintaining that perspective.

In my project management travels I have encountered extremes in regard to understanding the customer’s perspective. Some project managers are not even allowed to communicate directly with the customer. Some don’t even know who the “real” customer is.

This lack of customer perspective is contrasted with project managers who are actually embedded in the customer’s organization. Instead of just talking or meeting with the customer they essentially live with the customer, so they have first hand understanding of the customer’s environment and challenges. Somewhere between not even knowing who the customer is and living with the customer, a conscious decision must be made to make the investment to ensure contextual accuracy or accept the risks of the lack of it. Leaders can’t have it both ways.

Every organization should make a strategic decision regarding how they will ensure project managers will have contextual accuracy of the customer’s perspective.

I recently had the opportunity to sit down with Kathy Ericsson, Director, Project Management World Wide Operations for Citrix. My visit with her revealed a number of best practices that I will be sharing in the near future. The leadership in Business Technology Solutions and World Wide Operations require the project managers to be certified on Citrix products. Not a cursory knowledge… or overview knowledge… but certified! Think about the ramifications of this from the customer’s perspective. What does it say about the organization’s commitment to meeting the customer’s needs at the highest level?

It seems every leader and organization says "they value the customer’s perspective." You already know whether your leader or organization is just speaking hollow words or whether a real investment has been made. If your organization doesn’t make a real commitment, I encourage you to go the extra mile and make it as an individual. The dividends far outweigh the cost.
The Ideal Stakeholder

• Shows an interest in the project or program.
• Makes themselves available when necessary.
• Assigns qualified personnel to act on their behalf when they are unavailable.
• Willingness to be accountable.

The Ideal Stakeholder continued

• Reviews and signs required documents in a timely manner.
• Tells you their communication preferences.
• Prioritizes their preferences and requirements.
Who is the Most Important Stakeholder Group?

Dr. James T. Brown PMP PE CSP

I recently surveyed five groups of project managers and asked them to prioritize the following stakeholder groups. In alphabetical order they are Community, Customers, Investors, Suppliers and Team Members/Employees.

The average ranking for all of the groups was 1. Customers, 2. Team Members/Employees, 3. Investors, 4. Suppliers and 5. Community. One of the groups had employees/team members ranked number one, one group had investors ranked number one and three of the groups had customers ranked number one.

The variation in the groups was not a surprise. I recently read the book *Setting The Table: The Transforming Power of Hospitality in Business* by Danny Meyer. Why read a restaurateur’s book on hospitality? A big part of project management is stakeholder management, and whenever I can study excellence in seemingly unrelated fields, there are often strong parallels to project management.

Team Members are Number One! Are You Kidding?

Meyer shared how his restaurants began struggling and he had to re-establish his priorities and values. He described his priorities as “Enlightened Hospitality” and it puts stakeholders in the following order: 1. Team Members/Employees, 2. Customers, 3. Community, 4. Suppliers and 5. Investors. He credits this philosophy for turning his restaurants around and contributing to a very successful business.

Fundamental to his philosophy of Team Members/Employees being the most important, is the truth that if the team cannot treat each other with respect, hold each other in the highest regard and work harmoniously with one another, then it is difficult for them to treat the customer with respect, to hold customers with high regard and work harmoniously with them.

Disharmony within a team often migrates to external relationships.

Meyer’s most important concern is how his team members treat each other. This reminds me of some wise counsel given to me long ago…”Take care of your people first, and then everything else takes care of itself.”

It is just disingenuous to treat your fellow team members poorly and then treat your stakeholders well. It becomes an act. An act that at some point that will be exposed for what it is. Meyer believes, and has proven, that his prioritization ultimately benefits investors more.

Investors being ranked last provides greater returns in the long term.

It is a sad commentary and very evident in the current financial markets how focus on the short term ultimately is more costly and sometimes devastating. Two other important takeaways from Setting the Table are below:

1. Judge your staff on 51 percent emotional (attitude and interpersonal skills) job performance and 49 percent technical job performance. You can always teach technical, while emotional is much harder, if not impossible to develop. Lack of emotional job performance skills destroys teams and alienates customers.

2. Employees can be categorized as *Overwhelmers*, *Whelmers*, and *Underwhelmers*. It is easy to identify *Underwhelmers* and get rid of them. The most dangerous employees are the *Whelmers* because they tend to stay in the organization longer because their performance is adequate but “they infuse an organization and its staff with mediocrity…and send a dangerous message to your staff and guests that “average” is acceptable.”
The Ideal Stakeholder continued

- Doesn’t pressure project managers to circumvent the project management process
- Looks for opportunities to provide relief to the project team as appropriate
- Helps motivate project personnel
  - Shows appreciation for good work

Based on the characteristics for an ideal stakeholder my most important stakeholder is…

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100 % Ideal | 75 % Ideal | 50 % Ideal | Keep hope alive
Dear James,

Thank you for providing your advanced project management training class at our facility. Having previously seen you speak at a conference and taken some of your online training, I knew it would contain beneficial, real world advice attendees could put to use immediately. Your ability to customize the course on short notice for our specific challenges and desired outcomes maximized the value of the class. Equally impressive was making the class enlightening and relevant to all professionals, not just project managers. The use of the real time polling devices not only provided worthwhile insight for attendees during the training, but the results you were able to share with us after the event will be very useful information for leadership.

I received many positive comments from the attendees and our customers who participated have expressed an interest in having you provide the course for their organization. It’s rare when attendees don’t want the training to end, but the presentation style, including the mix of stories, real time polling, and hands on exercises, made it an outstanding and enjoyable experience. As one attendee wrote on their evaluation, “Thanks for making training fun.” It truly was the best three days of training I’ve ever taken.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Miller, PMP, EVP
Sr Project Manager
Satellite Control Network Contract
Honeywell Technology Solutions Inc.
Lead the Stakeholders

• This means you
• You are a peer
• Act as a peer
  – Regardless of the stakeholders level
If you liked the articles in this handout package, fill out the blue form and get signed up for Dr. Brown’s free SPAM free monthly newsletter “It’s a Project Manager’s World”

Connect with Dr. Brown on:

Email:  jtbrown@sebasolutions.com
Linkedin:  drjtb
Twitter:   @DrJamesTBrown

**Bringing Dr. Brown to your company is easy and pays for itself!**

After looking at a lot of project management training providers we brought Dr. Brown in to conduct the *Project Management Solutions* course for our project managers and organizational leaders. I personally attended the course and must say the course exceeded all of my expectations. It was one of the best training investments we ever made and is still paying dividends. Of course we brought Dr. Brown back for more training.”

*B. Price, Senior Vice President, CBC Companies*