

Project management for non-project managers

Written by Julie Desmond
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A kid stopped by my neighbor Tom's house the other day lugging a box of popcorn. Tom wasn't interested in buying popcorn, thanked the kid, and shut the door. An hour later, Tom went out for a bike ride. Outside, the bike was gone, but there was a box of popcorn in its place. The kid got Tom to buy the popcorn, but it came at a pretty high price. While I don't condone stealing bikes, I do think there are ways to motivate people to do what you want them to do without hitting them over the head with the fact that they have been motivated.

The closest career to popcorn salesperson, outside of sales, is Project Manager. PMs constantly juggle between timelines, management directives and budgets. And yet, a good PM can get everyone on board for a project without being obvious about their role as sales manager and chief motivator. Apply a few Project Management techniques to your own goals, interactions and projects and you should see positive, win-win results from those around you.

When a project comes in, a good Project Manager assesses the team. Where are each person's most solid skills? What experience and personality traits does each member offer? Not sure where the strengths are on your team? Ask people what they want to do. Most people have a comfort zone that coincides with their talents. People also appreciate buy-in. It doesn't mean everyone gets to do what they want all the time, but it helps to know.

Next, a Project Manager creates a project timeline. Backing in from the end result, the PM collaborates with team members to find out what tasks they see as critical and how long those tasks will take. Whether you're a manager or a mother, look at your team and imagine what your end result needs to be. What will it take to get there? How long will each of those tasks take? Now you have a timeline within which to reach your goal.

What about infighting? More than one PM I know recommends food or alcohol as the bridge to conflict resolution. I don't think food and booze are the reasons these things work; rather, when you introduce these you get people around the table. You get people away from their work and off the defensive somewhat. You get people talking in a relaxed setting. Really, how threatening are nachos? Now, instead of fighting, you're discussing. Big difference.

Finally, reward everyone appropriately for their contributions to every outcome. Some people

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live for public acknowledgement of their efforts; make a big deal out of things for them, create awards and pass them out publicly. Other people shy away from the spotlight. Publicly acknowledge these people's accomplishments, too, but slip them a gift certificate or an extra day off; these have more impact than a giant trophy for some people.

Getting people to do what you want them to do when you want them to do it is a challenge, but it has its rewards. If you're good, you'll succeed without anyone noticing how hard you've worked to get there.

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