

Project Management: 2 Words - BIG Headache

By Michael Russell

One of the first consulting jobs that I ever got was in project management. And let me tell you, there is no greater overwhelming responsibility than being a project manager and it is something I will NEVER do again. So what exactly is project management and what does a project manager do? Well, that depends on what the business is. Some projects are more overwhelming than others. Since I want to keep this article strictly to my own experience I will go over project management of an automated packing company.

This company packed ladies' shoes. But not through the conventional method that you might think. The actual packing was done by real flesh and blood people but the system used was totally automated and mind boggling to say the least. I'm not going to get into the specifics of how the system worked as this is an article on the actual project management itself but you do need to understand the pieces involved so I will cover them as needed.

Well, the first thing as project manager that I had to do was work with the budget I was given. A project manager is not the ultimate decision maker. That's the person above him, who is usually an executive vice president. In my case it was a divisional manager. A budget was presented to me and I had to set up the project within the constraints of the budget. To do that I had to determine what the project needed to succeed.

In this particular project this was what was needed. The hardware of the packing system itself had to be built from scratch so engineers had to be brought in to construct the system. These were contracted and paid by the hour, so a time estimate of how long it would take to complete construction was made. Then there was the computer software to run the equipment after it was built, so programmers had to be hired. Also it had to be taken into consideration that the programmers would need to be kept on even after the project was finished in case there were bugs found or enhancements that needed to be made. Then there were the workers themselves, the ones who actually packed the shoes, which also included managers to oversee the workers, so a personnel budget had to be made and stuck to. In this case we were way over budget so personnel had to be cut which cut down production.

Then there was the quality assurance team that had to be put together to make sure that the boxes were packed correctly. Then there was the security team that had to be put together to make

sure there was no theft. All of the above ultimately came down on yours truly. I'm not ashamed to say the project was a failure on several levels. The machines didn't work as efficiently as expected. The programmers were not very competent and there were a lot of bugs. Production didn't meet expectations. We couldn't pay enough to get skilled packers. It was just one thing after another. After one year the project was abandoned. I was out of a job and I never did anything like this again.

Yes, project management. It's 2 little words with a ton of responsibility.

Michael Russell

Your independent guide to Project Management

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