

Chapter 1



Building the Killer Project Team

Have you heard one of these gems?

- “There’s no I in TEAMWORK.”
- “Teamwork, simply stated, is less me and more we.”
- “TEAM = Together Everyone Achieves More”
- “A job worth doing is worth doing together.”
- “A successful team beats with one heart.”

God, they make us want to hurl. This is business, not a Hallmark card, and to get to the top in business—to get to the top in any field—you not only have to accept reality but master it. As far as teams go, that means dealing with egos and cliques and factions and squabbles and squalls. After all, as a project manager (PM) and chicken herder, it’s your job to iron out a team’s problems and nudge it in the right direction. Teams are simply vital to projects.

But it also means dealing with moments of gorgeous inspiration, times of friendship and collaboration that are nothing less than exquisite. There is, after all, one teamwork quote that we like: “None of us is as smart as all of us.” (Thanks to management/leadership author and guru Ken Blanchard for that thought.)

So, in the pages that follow, we’ve gathered some of the best advice on teamwork for the intelligent PM that we’ve found in more than four decades of dealing with teams of every stripe, from the highly dysfunctional to the high fliers. We trust you’ll enjoy it. But we also urge you to remember the simplest truth of building your project team: Projects are delivered by people, so choose them both—projects and people—wisely.

The Four Types of Teams

Teams are a bit like animals: They come in species, and they're immensely hard to tame, which is why it pays to know what kind of team you have so you'll know how to get the most from it. By and large, we like to break teams down into four types, depending on how team members communicate with one another:

Dysfunctional A dysfunctional team is just what it sounds like: a mess. Team members don't know one another very well, don't talk to one another very well, and certainly don't listen to one another very well. They work as independent agents with little or no coordination between them, barely toeing the leader's line. What's more, this species of team brings projects in over budget and behind schedule (or quite often, not at all), and rarely earns the trust or admiration of other teams in the enterprise. (In fact, sometimes they're scorned.) You'd think this species of team would be well on its way to extinction (they perform so badly that, over time, they degenerate or get disbanded), but in truth they're as common as flies in the forest. It's simply the nature of the beast. When a team first forms, it's burdened by the problems of its members—egos, insecurities, and so on—and they hinder the team's efficiency.

Competitive In the food chain, competitive teams are a step up from their dysfunctional cousins. Team players know each other and know the tasks at hand, and they function with a modicum of coordination. But, like animals that roam in packs, team members are given to competing with one another and trying to establish dominance. Fights for the leader's position are common as alpha males and females assert their territories. Needless to say, this hinders the project's progress and keeps the team, which may be composed of talented people, from coming into its own.

Communicative A communicative team is more evolved. Its members know how to talk to each other and more importantly, they know how to listen. They function with a reasonable degree of cohesion and

often have a track record of finished, successful projects. There's a clear and defined leader who runs the pack, and no one bothers to challenge his (or her) supremacy. What's more, buzz about these teams quickly spreads throughout the enterprise, as senior managers and executives sit up and take note of their performance.

Intuitive Think of a school of fish or a flock of birds turning—they do so without effort, perfectly timed, moving and thinking and breathing as one. This is the intuitive team, the highest species of team in the jungle. Its members not only know one another's strengths and foibles like the back of their hand, they know to respect them. With a tried-and-true leader, this team has the universal respect (and sometimes the awe) of other teams in the enterprise, and functions on loyalty and a level of self-knowledge so highly refined that little communication is needed to carry out tasks. These teams make things happen; these teams get things done.

As a PM and team leader, your goal is to build an intuitive team from the ground up. How? The tips in this chapter will help. But even beyond them, remember to use some common sense and follow some basic rules for being a good leader:

Be positive. It's infectious. Your attitude will go a long way with your team. And besides, nobody likes a sourpuss.

Don't micromanage. There's nothing that people hate more than being watched constantly. Give your team members the space they need to do their job and prove their competence.

Never carp. Instead, give sparing, constructive criticism. And couch it in careful terms—no one likes to be told he's wrong.

Value your group's ideas. Chances are they're better than yours. Having ten heads to put on a problem is better than having one.

It's also important to be patient: Becoming an intuitive team takes time and occurs like any other evolution: slowly. As it does, you'll evolve from a dysfunctional team to the other team types until you arrive at the

apex. And keep in mind that you don't have much of a choice: The corporate office is like the jungle, and "survival of the fittest" is the word of the day. Either your team evolves to the intuitive level or, in time, you become another part of the fossil record.

Writing with Cheap Pens

(Here's an example of a dysfunctional team in action, *with names and dates changed to protect the litigious and innocent.*)

Thank God for management, without whom we'd have no recourse to Bufferin (or hari-kiri). Just months ago a good friend and fine project manager—and cellist extraordinaire—told us a tale of a project team that devolved from intuitive to dysfunctional in a matter of days, thanks to management's lack of communication.

It happened like this: The management at a fine pen company in New York convened a project team to analyze which of their lines of pens had failed in the last five years and why. (An aside, for color: These were exceptional pens, made of silver, platinum, and rhodium, and costing, on the upper end, more than \$1000 each. These were the kinds of pens that presidents and prime ministers used to sign bills into law in gilded rooms with senators beside them and cameras before them.). But despite their beauty, not all of these pens sold well. The team was charged with finding a set of financial metrics to define a pen's failure and mapping out ways to avoid such failures in the future.

Like most teams, this one started with all the verve it needed to tackle the problem. In two months they'd evolved to the intuitive level, with team members implicitly knowing each others' needs and working as one towards the project goal. They met for an hour a week for three more months, and at the end of their fifth month, they met with management to present their findings. Little did they know their effective communication with each other did not extend to their communications with management.

The brass, it turned out, was not looking for an objective review of past failures, but a way to scapegoat certain projects for the firm's financial problems. They rejected the team's findings as a whole and sent them packing, back to the drawing board with little or no direction on how to deliver their work.

As a result, the team was so demoralized that its members began to bail, drifting off towards other projects and skipping team meetings. Not only did they not understand their new directives (what there was of them, anyway), they were utterly confused as to why their first piece of work was rejected. The team quickly regressed to the dysfunctional state, and in the end, they never produced another report to give to management.

They did, however, get their revenge, if subtly. For the next year they refused to write anything, even a Post-It note to their boss, with anything but a cheap ballpoint pen. 

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Calling Dr. Phil: Using Myers–Briggs Evaluations

Excuse us. Are you an ENTJ, an ESFP, an INTJ, an ESFJ, an INTP, an ENFP, an ISTJ, or an ESTP? Not sure? Not even sure what those acronyms mean?

No problem; we'll educate you. Those bizarre little series of letters are scores on the Myers-Briggs personality test. It's a simple model of personality based on four questions:

- Where do you direct your energy?
- How do you prefer to process information?
- How do you prefer to make decisions?
- How do you prefer to organize your life?

As you can guess, these questions are vital to knowing how a person reacts towards her team members, and how those team members approach a task.

There are three versions of the personality test to help you understand how you and your team members react to each other and how they might tackle project assignments. The first is the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)*, invented by Isabel Briggs Myers and Katharine C. Briggs. It requires a qualified administrator, called an MBTI Qualified Practitioner, who's almost always a shrink of one shade or another. (Check out www.myersbriggs.org to find out how to become qualified and certified to administer the MBTI.) The MBTI, as it's known, reports your personality using codes like the ones you saw above.

The second test is the *Keirsey Temperament Sorter*, which you can find in a small but popular book named *Please Understand Me* by David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates. It hews closely to the Myers-Briggs questionnaire and can be purchased at most online bookstores. (You can find more information about it at www.keirsey.com.)

The third test is the *Management Team Role-indicator (MTR-i) questionnaire*, which, like the MBTI, must be administered by a good psychologist. It's published by The Test Agency and was developed in an Internet study using more than 20,000 respondents. It reports your work persona or team

role, such as Coach, Curator, Explorer, Innovator, Sculptor, or Conductor. As you can guess, it's tailored to your work context and how you interact in teams. You can find more information about the MTR-i at www.16type-suniversity.com/mtri.html.

Now, a note in deference to you skeptics: As with all questionnaires, these are reductive typologies that can clearly be “wrong.” There's no way to reduce the complex subtleties of the human psyche to a simple code that tells you all you need to know about how a person reacts in groups. In fact, it's ludicrous to think it can be done. But that's not the value of Myers-Briggs or any of its offshoots.

The true value is what these tests reveal to you about yourself, and what they reveal to your team about how to interact with you. They're *not* a communications nostrum; they're simply a way to find out who's more expressive than others, who prefers hard facts to intuition or gut feelings, who needs a structured work environment, who has an entrepreneur's talent for thriving on chaos, and so on. They're an invaluable tool to see what your team members are made of, and how they'll work together and with you as their leader. Applied at the start of a project, the MBTI, which can be run in an hour as part of your project kickoff meeting, can give you precious insight into your team members' way of doing business.

Now, that said, it's not our goal to turn you into a Ph.D. overnight. And the truth is, we can't. We're no experts in the rarefied realms of psychological testing. But we *can* explain a thing or two about the Myers-Briggs test and what you'll need to know to get the most out of it for your team. (We'll stick with the MBTI, rather than the Keirsey or MTR-i, because MBTI is the oldest of the three and far and away the one most commonly used.)

Let's start with those four questions we mentioned before:

- Where do you direct your energy?
- How do you prefer to process information?
- How do you prefer to make decisions?
- How do you prefer to organize your life?

Where do you direct your energy? This one's easy. If you direct the bulk of your energy to the outer realm of people, activity, and words, you're an Extrovert, or an E. If, on the other hand, you put your mental faculties into the inner realms of ideas, thoughts, and information, shying away from the outer, more social world, then you're an Introvert, or an I. Get the picture?

By and large—and again, we're not trying to encapsulate the whole of the human psyche in a pill-sized paragraph, merely to make a few astute, if general, observations—extroverts are social, expressive, expansive, and tend to put action before thought. Compare them to introverts, who by definition are private, quiet, contemplative, and put thought before action. Introverts may also feel exhausted after intense interactions with other people, the kind you're likely to see in a team on a tight deadline.

Which are you?

How do you prefer to process information? Do you prefer known facts and familiar terms, or do you prefer to explore new patterns and meanings in data? If it's the former, it's called *Sensing*, or S in the Myers-Briggs scheme. If it's the latter, it's called *Intuition*, or N. (Why not I? To avoid confusion with Introvert, of course.)

Let's explain this in more depth. The Sensing mode is focused on the present, on tangible reality, on seeing what is and not what might come to pass. On the contrary, the Intuition preference puts greater weight on insight and the future, on what could be and not on what is. At its extreme, sensing can focus so much on the here and now that it fails to see the realm of possibility. Intuition, by contrast, can focus so much on possibility that it fails to see the reality of the present.

People who rely on sensing tend to like facts, evidence, practicality, and realism. The intuitives among us, on the other hand, are into possibilities, novelties, aspirations, change, and idealism.

How do you prefer to make decisions? Do you make decisions on the basis of logic or objective considerations, or do you decide an issue based on your personal values? If it's the first, it's called *Thinking* in the Myers-Briggs scheme and denoted by T; if it's the second, it's called *Feeling*, denoted by—guess what?—an F.

This one's rather easy to define. Thinkers are objective analysts. They're often logical—sometimes coldly so—and they decide on principle and take the long-term view. By contrast, feelers are more subjective and empathic, more personal, have a greater appreciation for the views of other participants, and take an immediate view of the situation.

How do you like to organize your life? Do you prefer to live in a structured way, with a preference for making strong decisions, or do you prefer to live in a bit of flux, keeping your options open?

If you like the structured life, you're said to have *Judgment*, or J, in the Myers-Briggs typology. If, on the other hand, you like a more flexible life, open to pleasures as you find them, you're said to have *Perception*, or P.

Someone whose preference is Judgment likes to decide things, often ahead of time—what to do, where to go, what to say, and so forth. As a result, they appear organized or, taken to the extreme, even rigid. They like structure, firmness, planning, control. Those with a preference for Perception like to learn or experience new things. They're more comfortable when they keep their options open and their ear to the ground. As a result, they can appear flexible to their friends and colleagues. Inquisitive, they like to explore and excite; they like spontaneity.

Extrovert-Introvert. Sensing-Intuition. Thinking-Feeling. Judgment-Perception. In all there are sixteen combinations...which are you?

ESTJ (Extrovert, Sensing, Thinking, Judgment): The Supervisor
The ESTJ is an extrovert, so he draws his energy from those around

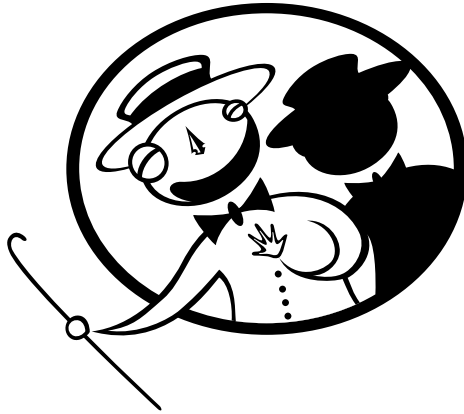
him, from the outside world of people and actions. He also prefers to use logic to deal with facts and the present, and keeps his life organized in a logical way. Practical and pragmatic, the ESTJ is likely to try known and trusted solutions for problems, which he'll attack in a fairly impersonal manner. And he's a detail man, preferring to hone in on the specifics of a project rather than spend time on strategy.



INFP (Introvert, Intuition, Feeling, Perception): The Healer An introvert, the INFP looks to the future, to possibilities, and decides on personal values. She leads a flexible life, quiet and adaptable, but only up to a point. The INFP can surprise people with a sudden rigidity when her values are violated. With a bent for creativity, she has a hidden warmth for people and a desire to see others grow.

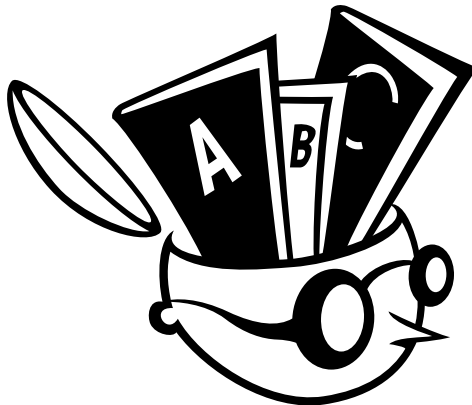
ESFP (Extrovert, Sensing, Feeling, Perception): The Performer The ESFP is an extrovert—he takes his energy from the outside world of people and actions. Given to sensing, not intuition, he prefers to deal with facts. He also deals in the present and likes friendships. (In fact,

he tends to make new friends easily.) Flexible, he takes life as it comes, nearly to the point of impulsivity. He also has a taste for the urgent problem and its solution. The ESFP is a known firefighter, and a damn good one at that.



INTJ (Introvert, Intuition, Thinking, Judgment): The Mastermind

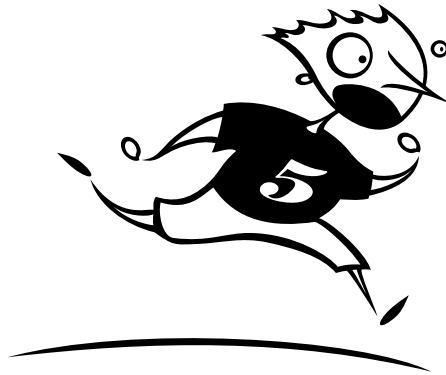
This introvert tends to decide things on the basis of impersonal analysis. He's a rather organized strategist who contemplates life's long-term goals; in fact, his life may be organized to meet them. He's skeptical and often critical, both of self and others, and has a nose for deficiencies in quality and competence alike. INTJs often have big brains and can apply them to details relevant to larger strategies.



ESFJ (Extrovert, Sensing, Feeling, Judgment): The Provider This extrovert likes facts but makes decisions based on personal values. Warm and outgoing, she's a people person who looks to maintain harmony with colleagues and friends, and doesn't always warm to conflict or critique. Her strong sense of duty and loyalty makes her want to be of service, and she has a genuine desire to help others.

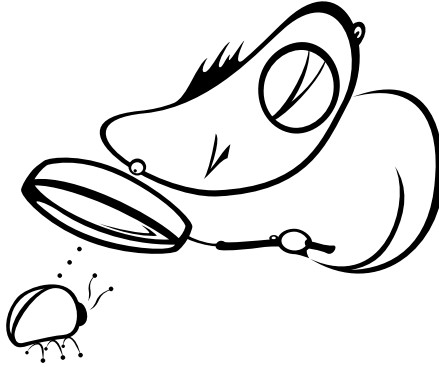
INTP (Introvert, Intuition, Thinking, Perception): The Architect An introvert, the Architect decides questions on a logical basis. She likes a flexible life and goes with the flow. She's quiet, possibly detached, and reasonably adaptable. She'll often experiment or change things to see if they can be improved, and tends to operate best when her intellect, most often large, is put to the solution of complex problems.

ENFP (Extrovert, Intuition, Feeling, Perception): The Champion The Champion, an extrovert by nature, prefers to think about future possibilities over the here and now, especially where people are concerned, and decides things based on personal values. She's creative, insightful, and may sometimes neglect details and planning. But she enjoys work that involves experimentation and variety, so long as it's working towards a general goal.



ISTJ (Introvert, Sensing, Thinking, Judgment): The Inspector The Inspector is more than an introvert: He's a hard-nosed dealer in facts who likes to make decisions after he's considered all the options. He

likes to organize his life on a logical basis. He's quiet, serious, and tends to be well-prepared. He's a keen observer, a watcher and listener who won't always express his thoughts, but has a strong sense of goals and works hard to meet them.



ESTP (Extrovert, Sensing, Thinking, Perception): The Promoter

This extrovert swims in pools of facts and makes decisions on a purely logical basis. He also leads a flexible life that consists of activities that interest him. A problem solver, he's action-oriented, so much so that he can be impulsive. He likes trouble-shooting but at times can neglect follow-through. That said, he's a wonderful team member to have in situations that need organizing and solving.



INFJ (Introvert, Intuition, Feeling, Judgment): The Counselor An introvert, the Counselor sees the future and possibilities in people, maintains a private sense of purpose in life, and works to fulfill that goal. Brimming with empathy, he shows a quiet concern for people. This in turn makes him a good manager: He'd like to help his colleagues grow, and his insight—which sometimes remains unexpressed—is often impeccable.

ENFJ (Extrovert, Intuition, Feeling, Judgment): The Teacher The Teacher is an extrovert. He's intuitive and prefers to think in terms of possibilities in the future. He also looks to develop and maintain stable relationships with people he likes, as well as promote personal growth in others. Highly sociable and expressive of feelings, they can find conflict and critique difficult, but tend to work best with other people, not alone.



ISTP (Introvert, Sensing, Thinking, Perception): The Crafter An introvert, the Crafter deals in facts and logical decisions, the here and now, but keeps her life flexible and takes things as they come. Quiet and detached, she's adaptable up to a point. She also has a talent for solving organizational problems, and may be very curious about why things work. While she can seem impulsive, she can also produce

surprising—and surprisingly good—ideas and unpredictable, often unorthodox solutions.

ENTJ (Extrovert, Intuition, Thinking, Judgment): The Field Marshall This extrovert likes to look to the future and consider the realm of possibility. (But she won't leap before she looks; she'll consider the results of her actions before she takes them.) She tends to be logical and controlling, organizing systems and even people to meet her goals. ENTJs are often executives and directors; their approach, not surprisingly, is often called impersonal. On occasion, they may appear intolerant of people who don't seem to be good at what they do.

ISFP (Introvert, Sensing, Feeling, Perception): The Composer A known introvert, the Composer likes to deal with facts and people and decides the questions of life and work based on a set of personal values. She's adaptable, she's quiet, she's friendly, and she enjoys the company of others one on one or in small numbers. This person enjoys the present and tends to dislike conflict.

ENTP (Extrovert, Intuition, Thinking, Perception): The Inventor The Inventor is an extrovert who looks to the future and the realm of possibility. He tends to decide issues on a logical basis free of emotions, and likes to increase his own competence and skills. An ingenious problem solver, he enjoys a good argument, likes to promote change, and operates best in situations where creative effort drives new solutions.



ISFJ (Introvert, Sensing, Feeling, Judgment): The Protector An introvert, the Protector likes dealing with facts, but decides on personal values. He leads an organized life, and is quiet, serious, and concerned for the feelings of others, often to the point of solicitude. He tends to be loyal and conscientious, and prefers to be of practical service to the group. Like most, he dislikes confrontation and conflict, but he's willing to risk it when others' feelings are at stake.

As a PM you can run Myers-Briggs at the start of your projects, using your team as lab rats. The most effective way is to bring in a MBTI Qualified Practitioner for the first team meeting. He'll be able to run the test and talk about the different personality types. And while it won't tell you all you need to know about your team members, it will give you some basic insight into how they think, feel, and act, and how they're apt to act towards one another—how, that is, they'll work as a team. It can also tell you who's good at what.

An example: Say you've got a problem that needs a novel solution. Assign an Inventor (ENTP) or a Crafter (ISTP) to handle the job. Both thrive on ingenious problem-solving; they're good with Gordian Knots. If, on the other hand, you've got a large, messy project that needs to be organized and whipped into shape, call on a Field Marshall (ENTJ). These little Napoleons know how to regiment people and resources alike (hence their name). Architects (INTP) are good at big, complex problems that need fine-tuning—it's the nature of their intellect to tweak and tinker. And Counselors (INFJ) have a talent for issues that need a touch of tact and empathy.

Hence you can use Myers-Briggs to fine-tune your team dynamics, assigning people to tasks based on their type. What's more, team members—after taking the Myers-Briggs test—will learn something about their own makeup and the makeup of their colleagues. And in the end, that can only foster the birth of killer teams.

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The '96 Olympics Personality Challenge

Ana O. was the daughter and granddaughter of Olympians. Her father medaled in the high jump—a bronze—as a young man, and her grandfather, competing for Mexico, brought home gold in his day when he beat a Finn and a Swede in the 100 meter hurdles. So they were overly pleased when Ana's first assignment as a newly-minted PM was to the '96 Atlanta games. Her task? Plan and run a ceremony for one of the rowing events.

There was, of course, a problem. The local Olympic committee had convened a project team of 16 members from different firms (only two were from Ana's firm) and some from different cultures. (After all, this was the Olympics.) And as a result, the team was finding it hard to communicate with any degree of efficiency.

Green but determined, Ana sought the advice of a senior PM in her firm. The PM was an advocate of using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator for team building, and he suggested she call a meeting to conduct the MBTI test and share the results with her team. She did, and it was an effective session that showed her diverse team the ins and outs of different personality types.

But rather than end it there, with a simple exercise conducted in group, Ana took it further. She had placards made for each team member that displayed his or her type: ENTJ, ISTP, and so on, along with a cartoon of each type. For the next three months, until everyone grew comfortable working together, team members displayed the placards somewhere on their desk, so that other members would know exactly which communication styles to use with one another. 

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Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing

Alas, as theories go, this one's not our own. But as with all good theories, it's worth knowing nonetheless.

In 1965, a man named Dr. Bruce Tuckman read through 50 or so studies on the way groups become teams. (Don't ask us why; maybe he had too much time on his hands.) He found that teams, for better or worse, pass through four stages on their way to cohesion: *Forming*, *Storming*, *Norming*, and *Performing*.

As a PM, it's important for you to know the stages so you can know which one your team is in—or mired in, as the case may be—and plot a strategy to find your way out. And it's important for your team to know the stages as well, so they know that what they're doing and feeling and the way they're reacting to one another is perfectly normal.

Forming This is the first stage in the team-building dynamic. It's the polite stage where team members get to know one another for the first time. By and large it's a time of high excitement and optimism, but beware: It's also a time for mild anxiety and suspicion. *Why are we here? What are we doing?* Team members may cautiously test the boundaries of good behavior and, as part and parcel of that testing, test the power of the group's leader as well.

While there can be pride in being chosen for the team, attachment to the team, at least for now, is still tentative. The team itself is embryonic: It's deciding what information needs to be gathered and how it should be given out. It's deciding who gets what information and why, and goals and metrics for performance are just coming into being. Because there's so much going on logistically, the team gets little done towards its goals at this point. And that, frankly, is quite normal.

Storming This is the stormy stage, the hardest phase of team growth. Now that members have met one another and begun the initial tasks of coalescence, they begin to inject themselves—and their egos—into the process of pushing the project forward. Personal agendas run rampant. Members begin to realize the full range of tasks that lie ahead;

invariably they see that those tasks are more diverse and difficult than planned. Arguments may abound: How should we proceed? Who should do what? Collaborations are rare and rarely work.

And it gets worse. Team members may resist the tasks they're assigned. They may resist you. Their attitudes towards the team and towards its chance for success may swing wildly. They may become defensive, competitive, or dysfunctional. Cliques may form. They may question the wisdom of those who formed the project; they may question the wisdom—and rights—of the PM. Expect jealousy and disunity.

But underneath these black currents of ill will and turmoil are signs of hope. Team members are beginning to understand one another. They're moving towards Norming.

Norming The breakthrough. The team begins to find its focus. It begins to build enthusiasm; over time, that reaches an apex and the team wants to go beyond its scope. Old wounds heal. Competitions morph into loyalties. Members begin to accept the team and their roles within it; the ground rules—simply words on paper before this phase—become sacrosanct. Emotional conflicts begin to fade.

Lo and behold, critique can be expressed constructively. Friendships emerge across cliques, and a sense of cohesion begins to build. Goals are shared across the team, and boundaries begin to be respected. Not only do you, the PM, begin to *see* progress, you begin to *feel* it, daily, in your bones.

Performing Nirvana. (Well, not quite. But from the point of view of team building, you're approaching enlightenment.) The team has found its stride and can really begin to run. Team members have finally learned each others' strengths and deficits, come to accept them, and learned to work with them. Goals are wholly agreed upon, and there's a sense of loyalty to the team.

By this point the team is in fighting form. It's a cohesive unit, and it's effective, as strong as Alexander's army.

So which stage is your team in? In fact it's not uncommon for teams to move back and forth between stages. A team that's chugging along in the Performing stage may jump back to Forming when new members sign on. A team that's Norming may find itself Storming when it's unable to meet a key goal, and so on.

If you're Forming, enjoy the honeymoon...Storming's on the way. If you're Storming, know that it won't last; like adolescence, it's just a normal, rowdy phase of development. (Though we do offer a caveat: We've seen groups that spend scads of time—abnormal amounts—in Storming. If you're one of them, own up to it and find a way out. If not, you'll come in over budget, behind schedule, and weak and tired at the finish line.) If you're Norming, enjoy those first nips of progress, and if you're Performing, give us a call and let us know how you got there. We're always up for a good story.

How to Fire a Team Member

What's the best way to fire a team member? Not to fire him at all, of course.

We'll explain. From time to time you'll request or inherit a team member from another part of the firm who turns out to be a dud. Perhaps he can't type. Perhaps he can't tie his shoes. Whatever. The bottom line is he's a dolt and you need to get rid of him—fast. But how?

You could, of course, confront him and duke it out. If that's your chosen course of action, you might as well sell tickets to the fight and set up concessions. (Popcorn is always good, and hot dogs, don't forget the relish, go well with a nice conflict.) After all, the entire office will know about it anyway; it's called the grapevine, and it works faster than you can say "gossip." And don't forget to factor in the effects it will have on office morale. Whenever you drop anyone from a team—except, perhaps, for the worst of parasites—team morale suffers.

So go the second route. Issue a recall, or to be more accurate, have a recall issued. In confidence, go back to the group leader that sent you this sorry excuse for a biped and broker a deal. Explain that it's not working out; that, despite best efforts, so-and-so is not working on your team, but to save face and avoid an incident, could you please "recall" him to his prior team so it *appears* as if he's being asked to return to his former home and not being asked to leave his new one?

Of course, the group leader you appeal to may be unwilling to help. But if you have some tact and you're willing to give some *quid* for some *quo*, there's a good chance you'll be able to swing a deal and fire a team member without having to fire him at all.

A note in closing: There are times when you simply *have* to fire a team member outright. His performance is so poor, his attitude so corrosive, that he's no good on any team, including yours. He's simply a cipher. You can't trade him off to another team because no one will take him. If that's the case, start to document his failings, and be meticulous. Note every error and mishap. Then, proof in hand, take it to the brass and request his dismissal. Because we live in a litigious culture, it's hard to fire someone outright, so you'll need to arm your executives with the data they need to justify their move.

You're Kinda Fired

His name was Lukas and he was a Czech architect of some renown, most of it gained as a young man when he designed, at the mere age of 30, a radical museum of modern art in São Paulo. But in the last two decades his career had faltered and he failed to get the commissions he sought, leaving him by and large an embittered man.

At 50 and needing money, he took a job as the project architect on the construction of a new sports arena in the deep South, where he supervised a team of 12 designers—badly. He was abusive and highly intolerant of errors; perhaps worse, he suffered no fools, a trait of patience that's often required of those who work on large projects where the team is a grab bag of talents.

Within a month his team of designers was at their wit's end, tired and ready to bolt their jobs for greener pastures. In desperation, they met in a Chinese restaurant, where they decided, over cashew chicken and spring rolls, with paper placemats of the Chinese Zodiac before them, to complain at length to the PM.

In turn, the PM went to the firm that assigned Lukas to the project and asked them to reassign him. They did, framing the new assignment as a promotion to avoid any negative stigma. Then they assigned a new architect to head the team of designers for the sports arena. The result? The arena had a world-class design, and friction in the project team was reduced to nil. 🍵

Learning (and Living) the IGT Rule

In the precise world of arithmetic, $1 + 1 = 2$, always. Likewise, $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$, and $1 + 1 + 1 + 1 = 4$. The whole is always the sum of its parts.

But in the amorphous mathematics of groups, $1 + 1$ can be less than 2, and $1 + 1 + 1$ can be less than 3. How? It's really quite simple.

Take a person, a single person, and put him alone in a room with a task, say, sorting widgets. Alone, he can sort 100 widgets per hour. Now put another person in the same room and have them sort widgets together. The result? Not what you'd expect. Do they sort 200 widgets per hour ($1 + 1 = 2$)? No. More like 150. Maybe 125. Why? Because they talk to each other (and hence lose time), argue (and hence lose time), and coordinate and sometimes fumble or drop widgets (and hence lose time).

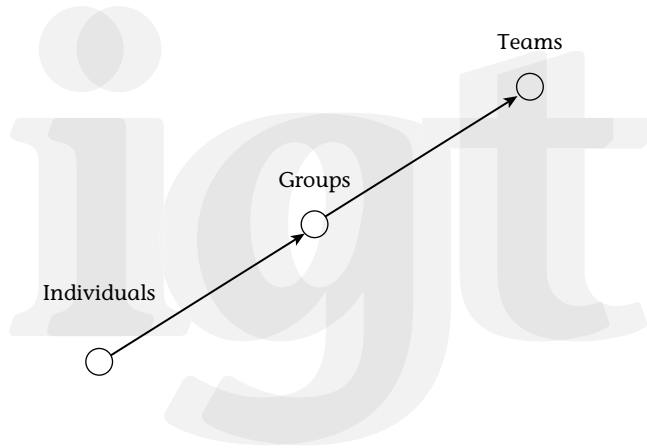
Add a third person and the problems of coordination grow more severe. True, there are more hands to do more work, and hence the *potential* for greater output exists, but there are also more problems that arise as those hands begin to interact. So in the strange math of groups, $1 + 1 = 1.5$. And $1 + 1 + 1 = 2.5$, and so on.

But over time, something happens. Those people in that room begin to develop rules. They begin to coordinate their efforts and communicate. They begin to standardize their movements and motions. They evolve a set of best practices. They may even evolve a hierarchy, with a defined structure and a head. They resolve their disputes and begin to learn the ins and outs of one another's personalities. In short, they begin to gel—that is, they begin to become a team.

The result? Output shoots up. At first, they sort 200 widgets per hour. Then 300. Then more, so that soon they're sorting a startling 1000 widgets per hour, more than any three people could possibly sort alone. And yet again a strange math evolves, this time for the good. Now, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Now, $1 + 1 + 1 = 10$.

Hence the *Individuals Groups Teams (IGT) rule*. We start alone with an output equal to one, then form groups whose output is less than the sum

of its parts (or, to be more accurate, less than the potential output of the sum of its parts). Only with time, training, and the application of talent do we form into teams, whose output is more than the sum of its parts.



So the question, of course, is which phase is your team in? Doubtless you've assembled a group of people to attack a project and drive it home, but are they truly a team? Do you have a well-defined structure with an agreed-upon head? (Most groups don't; all teams do.) Do you have standards and procedures and even best practices? (Groups simply reinvent the wheel; teams keep it well-oiled.) Do you have strong communication and communication channels? (Groups fight amongst themselves; teams talk to one another.) Have your conflicts been resolved, or, at the least, do you have a defined method of conflict resolution? (Groups bicker; teams work through their problems.)

If, as you read this, you find that your project "team" is more of a project group, take heart. Teams, like diamonds, take time and pressure to form. No time, no pressure, no team. Remember: The role of the PM and chicken herder is truly one of a survivalist: Your job is to help your group survive—to help them adhere and cohere—until they become a team. For that you need little more than wit, wisdom, perseverance, and a bit of luck.

Gilligan's Island

Sometimes it takes a boat to make a team evolve. Four years ago a PM named James N. headed a project team that was assembled to develop a piece of software at a large telco. Sadly, the team was truly dysfunctional. Its members had never worked together before, and infighting, cliques, and personal agendas reigned supreme. There was no clear understanding of the project scope, and the team, such as it was, had been languishing for close to three months.

But James was crafty. He rented a boat and took all 20 members of his team to a small but deserted island with nothing on it but flies—nothing, that is, but flies and a set of clues to a unique scavenger hunt that he'd laid out the day before. He left them stranded and took the boat sailing.

The team of 20 was split into four teams of five and made to search the island using the clues as guides. The prize? A cell phone, without which they were unable to call James to return with the boat and take them home.

With such an incentive to cooperate, they began to communicate, to learn each others' ins and outs and work less as a group of soloists and more as a symphony. The result? They covered the island and found the phone in two hours. They called James, who returned with the boat and a catered lunch (complete with shrimp and lobster, natch) and took the entire team sailing on the bay.

Back in the office, the team began to evolve. They identified their project's goals and deadlines, wrote a firm statement of scope with milestones, and outlined each person's responsibilities. Lo and behold, they began to cohere, and quickly left the dysfunctional stage and grew, over time, into an intuitive team. They found ways to combine their unique talents, set aside their group mentalities and cliques, and write a killer app that rocked. 🍷

Gasp! IPRs and Audits

Audits, as we all know, are roughly as fun as root canal. But *independent project reviews (IPRs)* are birds of a different feather. They're kinder, gentler reviews of your project team, designed to hurt no one. In fact, if you run them right, IPRs can be useful tools in your project arsenal.

We'll deal with audits in a bit. For now, an IPR, as the name implies, is a review of your project and its status by a team of experts (often they do nothing but IPRs, so they've honed their craft well) who have nothing to do with your organization. They're a set of outside eyes, sharp, eager, and often hired by you or a project's owner to give you their unbiased thoughts on how you're doing.

Why bother? After all, at the start of your project you established a set of metrics and other milestones to measure your progress and judge your own aptitude, no? True, but those are metrics that *you've* set, and set in your favor—otherwise put, they're biased towards you to begin with. An IPR brings a truly outside perspective to your project; it rids you of internal bias completely. (Unless, of course, you slip the IPR team a little something under the table. But we advise against that.)

Of course, there are other reasons to bring in some outside guns to size you up. Consider this: Your team is already stretched to capacity just to meet their regular reporting deadlines. How are they going to conduct a thorough review? With what resources? You just don't have the time and the people to review the data, do the interviews, crunch the numbers, and the like. What's more—and this gets back to the issue of bias—the people you do have are too close to the material to judge it well.

So enter the IPR team. At your request they'll review key reports, read key documents, do key interviews, and run key benchmarks against PM best practices. And if they're any good, they'll include in their final report a forecast of the total cost and time required to complete the project, not to mention variance and root cause analysis.

And they'll bring with them a few benefits:

- IPRs reduce the owner's risk—and yours, the PM's. No longer will the owner have to rely solely on the PM as his sole or most crucial

source of information; he'll have an independent, outside voice to whisper in his ear. And likewise, the PM, used to relying on his team or key members thereof, will have a useful backstop to ensure the information she gets from them is good.

- The IPR will also point out—politely and constructively—where you've gone wrong and how you can remedy it. And while that may sting a little (PMs, we know, have their pride too), better to know where the fault lines in your project lie before the earthquake hits than to learn their location when the ground starts to rumble.
- An IPR can point out what your team needs. If, for example, you've been pushing for a third network printer for two months but your pleas have fallen on deaf ears, a recommendation from an outside party—the IPR team—may be just the ammo you need to get heard.

So how do you get an IPR? There are firms who do nothing but IPRs, and even some who specialize in IPRs in certain fields (software development, construction, and so on). Just Google them. (For those of you not entirely sure what that means, shame on you! Get yourself to the Web, go to the Google search engine at www.Google.com, and search for “independent project review.”)

The wise PM will schedule IPRs for large, long projects at regular intervals in her project's duration, say, once every quarter, six months, or yearly. Fees vary from firm to firm depending on the nature of the project they'll have to analyze and the amount of work it requires.

Now on to *audits*, evil, evil audits. Audits take place only when there's blood in the water. Where IPRs are positive, audits are negative. Where IPRs look to the future, audits look back—with a vengeance. Where IPRs look for inefficiency and suggest solutions, audits look for mistakes and cast blame. IPRs, like a shot of insulin, happen to living, breathing projects to stabilize and fortify them. Audits cut up a cadaver.

If your project is in an audit, then something has gone deadlly wrong. Chances are the project's owners are fighting among themselves, and litigation is either imminent or already upon you. Perhaps you've already done some time on the witness stand, or perhaps you're about to. Either

way, an audit's been called to pick over the bones of your project and bury it in the sand.

That said, the only question is how to protect yourself and your team from an audit. And the answer is: You may not have to. Or rather, you may have already done so. If you've followed project management's best practices and been careful to document every step of your project—every change request, every budget addition, every turnover in personnel—you've insulated yourself and your team from the damage of the audit, bite and bark alike. By their very nature, audits rely on a paper trail. The better yours is, the better off you—and your team—will be. And don't forget the value of the IPR: Planning one in the first place can help you avoid an audit altogether.

Training Newbies, Using Mentors

It's a sad fact, but true: You'll likely inherit your project team (along with your project, for that matter), and as such, you'll inherit a sundry bunch of folks with skills that range from adept to expert and every shade in between. You'll have everyone from *newbies* to old hands. The question, of course, is what do you do with such a motley mix (besides bang your head against a wall)?

One of the simple answers is to invest in a hefty dollop of *on-the-job training* (OJT) to boost the skills of the newbies up a rank or two. How? Start with the basics: gatherings, officially led trainings, and workshops.

- Weekly Lunch 'n Learns can offer an informal environment where your more seasoned team members—indeed, some of your subject matter experts (SMEs), whom we'll discuss later in this chapter—can share their knowledge over tuna salad or tofu. (Pizza is always good, too: It brings people running.)
- There's always the Project Management Institute (PMI), brimming with online education at www.pmi.org (for a small fee, of course).
- Consider some one-day workshops. They won't take your people out of the loop for long, but they will leave them with a heavy dose of new knowledge that can pay dividend upon dividend in the future.

In fact, the smart chicken herder knows to budget training as a line item in every large project and most small projects she runs. After all, one way to define a manager—and one that's accepted by thousands, if not millions, of managers across the globe—is simply as a person who helps others below her come into their own, to grow as workers whose output (and outlook) improves daily. What better way to help them grow than to help them find the training they need?

But truth be told, OJT only goes so far. The real question is how you get the senior members of your team—the ones with skills to spare—to share those skills with their juniors. How do you get them, that is, to cross-pollinate?

Enter the *mentor*. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, this word means “a wise and trusted counselor or teacher;” as a verb it means “to serve as a counselor or teacher, especially in occupational settings.” It also has quite a little history, dating back to the time of the Greeks and Homer’s *Odyssey*. In it, Athena, disguised as a man named Mentor, guides Odysseus’ son Telemachus in the search for his father. Hence the meaning of the word *mentor* as *guide* and by extension, *counselor* or *teacher*.

Now, Greek lessons aside, what does this have to do with your projects, you ask? Simple: Part of your role as a project manager is to bring about the cross-pollination of ideas among the members of your project team. And there’s no better way to do it than to promote, in an informal, unstructured way, student-mentor bonds between newbies and SMEs or other senior members of your project team.

Teach the Teachers

Don’t forget that mentoring—teaching of any kind, for that matter—is an art, and one that takes practice. You can’t simply assign a mentor to a newbie on your team and expect sparks to fly. You have to remember to teach the teachers, too.

How, and where? Consider the SME meeting discussed later in this chapter. Use this gathering as a chance to let your senior team members and SMEs know that you’ll be pairing them informally with junior colleagues in an effort to improve their colleagues’ skills. Then open up the floor to a discussion on how to do it best. 

How do you promote student-mentor bonds? The first step is to know, with some degree of precision, what skills your team members have and what skills your team members need. The easy part is learning what skills they have. Simply conduct a *skills assessment* (or *self-assessment*) for each. Find out who knows Russian; who’s done focus groups; who’s got a handle on PeopleSoft; who gets ROI and its calculation; who knows all about search engine marketing; or who’s dealt with the press.

Then, by intuition and observation, begin to learn who's lacking in which skills. Perhaps you have a team member who knows little or nothing about project management. You can take him under your wing. Perhaps you have another team member whose presentation skills are lacking. Here, clearly, you'll need to pair him with a mentor who speaks with the ease of Clinton and the power of Reagan, and let it rub off. And so forth. Remember: Your team is your team's best asset. Be smart. Let them train one another. Let them mentor one another. And let them grow as a team.

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What About Your Project Intranet?

Do you have a project *intranet*? If not, then get off your duff and get one, by hook or by crook. It can be made into a goldmine.

A prime example: Once you've deeply surveyed your team for their skill sets, and know, for example, who's a whiz with PowerPoint macros and who's got experience with Costa Rican contractors, put the information online *and make it searchable*. That way, you're not the only one responsible for your team's cross-pollination of knowledge. When a team member has an issue that's over his head or out of his league, he can simply hop online, search the intranet, and find out which of his colleagues, if any, have experience in that field. 

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Turnover: It's Gonna Happen

God, we hate to lose good talent. A good worker—the kind you can trust, depend on, call on, the kind you can leave alone—is worth her weight in gold. Losing one is like having a tooth pulled. A front tooth, no less.

But the truth is you'll always lose talent on your projects. It's a fact of life you can't help. In fact, you may be the very talent you lose—on some projects, even the PM has to go from time to time. Take, for example, large-scale construction jobs where there's one PM to manage the basic structure (we're talking foundation, walls, and so forth) and a second who comes in when the structure's done to manage the interior finishings (the light fixtures and such). Often these shifts from one PM to another are determined well in advance, at the start of the project as part of the project plan.

If you've got a project that runs for two, three, or five years, there's bound to be scads of project turnover. As a rule of thumb, you're lucky if good talent stays on the project for two years. If you're one of those rare people who can keep good talent for more than two years, well, hallelujah.

That said, we'll break down the turnover you see in your projects into two different types: involuntary on the one hand, voluntary on the other. Perhaps a better way to phrase this is unplanned and planned.

No one can stop unplanned turnover. Sadly, there are times when workers—even the best—are run over by beer trucks, or have to leave the project team in undue haste when Aunt Tilly dies and leaves them a fortune. (Laugh if you will, but this happened to us before: A valued worker left one of our projects when a distant uncle died and left her a mint in Fabergé eggs.) So buck up and bear it. There's nothing you can do to stop this simple fact of life but pray, and even that bears uncertain results.

Voluntary or planned turnover is an altogether different animal, and a welcome change. When does it happen? As discussed above, when a PM is phased out in favor of another at a crucial—but planned—juncture in the project. Or perhaps you have a contract worker whose contract expires in two months. Since he's let you know that he's unavailable after that (sadly, another gig calls), you have the time and inclination to plan for his departure.

Since you have time to plan for his departure, you also have time to plan for his replacement, and there's no safer way to do this than having a first-rate *project control manual (PCM)* or *project library*, whether it's planned or unplanned turnover at issue. Why? When the replacement arrives—we'll name him Elvis—he can abscond to a quiet room with binders in hand and start to read. In the PCM, Elvis can learn how to handle change requests, time extensions, letters of notification, design deficiencies, *requests for information (RFIs)*, and more.

From your project library he'll read old meeting minutes, reports, budgets, timelines, org charts, changes in org charts, project objectives, initial schedules, new schedules, future schedules under review...in short, anything and everything he needs to come up to speed in no time flat. (This applies to unplanned turnover as well. If you need to bring someone in quickly to fill a void from a sudden absence in your team, there's no better way to bring him current than to sit him down with the PCM and have him read.)

And what's more, with planned turnover, you can schedule overlaps between incoming and outgoing personnel. Otherwise put, Elvis and the man he's replacing can spend a week together, one learning the other's job.

Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder

Wires. This book was born in the wires between Atlanta and Miami and San Francisco. Why? Because its authors, Dan Bradbary and David Garrett, live in the first two of those cities respectively, and its editors, Heather O'Connor and Leslie Light, live in the third. What's more, Dan and Dave have never met Heather and Leslie, merely talked with them by phone and e-mail. And that, friends, is what you call a virtual team.

Let's define that term. A *virtual team* (VT) is a team in disparate locations that rarely if ever meets, but works with all the finesse of an on-site team that meets every day. In fact, and in the extreme, a VT can meet round the clock. How? Take, for example, the virtual team that a software giant had formed that consisted of three groups: one in the U.S., one in Europe, and one in India. Tasked with software development, they passed around the source code in eight-hour shifts from the U.S. to Europe to India, so it was never *not* being worked on, 24 hours a day.

VTs have their benefits. No longer bound by geography, you can hire the best people, the best talent, location be damned. What's more, workers tend to be more productive in their own settings, whether that's at home or in their own office space. And that means you'll pay less for rent and infrastructure than you would in a "standard" office.

But there's a dark side to the virtual team as well: absenteeism, overload, loafing, and low commitment from certain team members. For better or worse, co-location is still the preferred way to work, just because of the nature of human nature. We prefer proximity. We like closeness. And to quote an old saw, "trust needs touch." Teams thrive on trust, which grows fastest when you can see (and yes, touch) those you're supposed to trust.

That said, you may find yourself working in virtual teams for part or even all of a project's duration. If so, we have a few words of advice for you:

- VTs need technology like fish need water. So don't be content to merely know *about* the technology or know enough to get by. *Know* the technology, back and forth. Remember: As team leader, you set the tone for everyone below you. If you act like a Luddite, don't expect your colleagues to do much better. And in virtual teams,

that can be deadly. Consider this: If you spend merely 5 minutes a day looking for lost e-mail (and most of us spend more), that's 25 minutes per week, or 100 minutes per month for 1200 minutes per year. That's 20 hours, or half a work week, lost to a technical glitch you could easily tame with a bit more knowledge.

- You'll also need a high degree of technical literacy among team members. Now is not the time to seek or hire those who think a CD drive is a cup holder.
- Remember to make the most of simple technologies: e-mail with attachments, teleconferencing, and instant messaging. And don't shy away from the snazzier, jazzier stuff: intranets, extranets, and the like. Curious? Get your feet wet at www.intranets.com. This site lets you and your project team share documents, calendars, contacts and tasks, have online discussions, build database apps, run an audio conference, run opinion polls, manage expense reports, and post announcements, all for dollars a day. Best of all, it's blindingly easy. Even your parents could use it.
- As the PM on a virtual team, you're more than the team leader—you're the team communicator. You'll have to hold the team together, no small task when the team can't see one another from day to day. Bear in mind that some PMs spend as much as a third of their time on the phone, binding their teams together like glue.
- Don't forget to meet from time to time—in fact, as often as your pocketbook (and the rules of efficiency) permit. Remember, "trust needs touch," and there's value in doing business the old-fashioned way: face to face. If you can't meet, find a way to personalize the virtual experience. To wit, post team members' photos on your intranet, so people have a way to put a face with the voice they hear daily on the phone.
- Videoconference. It ain't what it used to be. Now it's simple, cheap, and easy. (For more info on videoconferencing, see Chapter 5, "The Perfect Meeting.")

- Don't stint on the quality of your communications equipment. If you need to shave pennies from your budget, find someplace else to do it. Good VTs need the best technology they can possibly afford.
- More than with a co-located team, VTs need a strong set of written performance metrics: goals, objectives, project specs, and the like. You won't be face to face with your team every day, so you'll need to know you're all on the same page.

And last, find workers who can handle a high degree of autonomy. After all, that's just what you plan to give them. Be sure they'll give you back what you need in return.

Working with SMEs

Newsflash: We don't know jack about JavaScript or cures for neuropathic pain. Guess what? We've never bothered to bone up on the finer points of product packaging or learn the ins and outs of pollution control in power plants. And frankly, we don't give a damn about non-Euclidian numbers or combinatorial geometry or international copyrights. Why? Because we have lives, thank you very much.

Problem is, the outcome of your project could turn on subjects as rarefied as these, and there comes a time in the life of every large project (and most small ones, too) when you need an expert's touch, someone who knows the ins and outs of amortizing rental agreements as well as you know the plot line of *The Sopranos*.

Enter the *subject matter experts* (SMEs) (pronounced *shmees*). SMEs are just what they sound like, armies of men and women whose job is to know tiny corners of human knowledge with such depth and breadth that you, thankfully, don't have to. But you do have to worry about working with SMEs, since

- They're often highly intelligent.
- Like most of the world's highly intelligent humans, they have definite thoughts on how to run a project, and those thoughts may not gel with your own.
- Owing to their years of study, high discipline, and advanced training, some of them resemble Yoda.

The truth is, your project may have as many as a dozen SMEs tasked to it, from finance, IT, legal, engineering, and other disciplines. You'll need a way to draw all that brainpower into the open air in a way that vaguely resembles efficiency. What's more, you'll need to do it in a way that cuts down on conflict, since big brains carry with them big egos. And last, you'll need to do it in a way that moves your project forward towards that blessed day called project completion.

With that in mind, we've assembled a tip or two on working with SMEs:

Round 'em up and make 'em meet. Have a SME meeting. In fact, do it shortly after the project kickoff meeting. Invite only your SMEs and plan to spend half an hour or so together (no more—SMEs can have short attention spans) with a loose agenda. Let them introduce themselves to each other and explain their specialties, and most importantly, how those specialties will relate to the project at hand. Even better, let them explain what they'll need from the other SMEs in the room. Will legal need special reports from the SMEs in accounting? Will the engineering SME need to collaborate with the IT SME on a SME database? And so on.

Learn to translate. SMEs speak a language called SME. You may have heard it before; it comes in several dialects: SME_{LEGAL}, SME_{IT}, SME_{ENGINEERING}, and more. An example:

You: "What's wrong with the project intranet?"

SME: "There's a TCP/IP stack error and the RAM disk on the Apache server is unstable."

SME in translation: "It's broke."

Remember that a project manager is above all a fine communicator. It's not merely your job to keep the trains running on time; it's your job to ensure the engineer can talk to the fireman and the fireman can talk to the stoker. So part of your job is to translate among SMEs and between SMEs and non-SMEs alike, a tough job indeed. You'll need to learn just enough SME (the language) to speak intelligently with SMEs (the people), and you'll need to become adept at rendering the complex ideas of experts in plain, simple English, or helping them do it themselves.

To that end, remember that a SME who can speak in plain English is a rare find and should be hired as part of your project team immediately.

Never waste a SME. A good lawyer once told us that nearly a third of his clients in his career (which spanned some three decades and took him from the backwoods courts of Louisiana to the Supreme Court no less than twice) hired him and gladly paid his outrageous hourly fee only to ignore his advice. The result? “They got themselves into a lot of trouble,” he said.

Remember that SMEs are experts. They’ve spent years, often decades, learning their craft, and if one thing is true, they tend to know it well. While you can feel free to discard a SME’s thoughts on management and project management in particular, discard his advice in his field of expertise at your own peril. In other words, when the lawyers talk law, listen, no matter how much it hurts. If the geeks in IT tell you the database can’t handle the number of records you need, no matter how many times you hit the computer, believe them.

Bear in mind that you’re paying your SMEs a good deal more than you’re paying your other team members. Perhaps the dumbest thing you could do is discard their advice. You’ll not only waste your money, you’ll waste your time. And in a project, what’s more precious than time?

Let SMEs check SMEs. That said, no SME is perfect, and the best ones know this. That’s why it’s wise to let SMEs check the work of other SMEs for safety and accuracy. In fact, it’s a common practice among certain SMEs. Engineers, for example, often pay other engineers (even competing firms) to check their numbers before they turn in a project, just to be sure they’ve got it right.