CHAPTER 1

# Why This Book Is Needed

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Project management is an academic discipline, a business activity, and a strategy—indeed, a profession. Some magazines and newsletters publish nothing but articles about it. A small library could be compiled consisting exclusively of books about it. There are training sessions, seminars, and certifications that focus on project management. Dozens of universities offer master's degrees in the discipline, and a few offer doctorates.

It might seem everything there is to know about project management already exists. With all the information available about the subject, it would be reasonable to assume that the only thing authors have to offer today is refinements to the discipline, a few insights, some tweaking here and there. Who really needs another book about project management?

I've been a project manager for over a quarter century. I've managed projects from those with budgets of a few thousand dollars and a handful of people to projects costing tens of millions of dollars and involving thousands of people.


No matter what the project—its goals or its purpose, large or small—certain aspects of managing a project are consistent. And one of these consistencies is the need to communicate.

Certainly, much has been written about communicating among the team members of a project. As I write this, I'm looking at a 1,000-plus-page textbook on project management, *Project Management*, ninth edition (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2006, p. 234), by Harold Kerzner that notes: "Because of the time spent in a communications mode, the project manager may very well have as his or her responsibility the process of *communications management* [emphasis, the author's]. Communications management is the formal or informal process of conducting or supervising the exchange of information upward, downward, laterally, or diagonally. In short, the main business of project managers may be communication. There appears to be a direct correlation between the project manager's ability to manage the communications process and project performance."

This book is about project management communications, and therefore project performance. It is about straight talk that adequately and efficiently illustrates the whole story. But unlike anything I've ever seen written about project management communications, this book is primarily about communicating with those who are not part of the project, both inside and outside the organization. Yes, every project has an audience deeply interested in the project though not directly involved in it, yet few project managers know how to effectively communicate with this constituency.

This constituency includes the board of directors, senior management, suppliers, customers, superiors or subordinates indirectly involved with the project or its outcome, and others.


Your success as a project manager is in direct proportion to your ability to communicate project performance (i.e., scope, timeliness, and planned versus actual resources), current completions, and future expectations.

The initial idea for this book, and more specifically the one-page project manager tool, came from a need I found in every project I managed—communicating a project's status, and the performance of those in charge of various aspects of the project, to the company's senior management.

Corporate management wants to know about projects, particularly larger ones. Even small projects have managers at some level in the corporate hierarchy who have an interest or responsibility for the project, yet are not directly part of the project. Bigger projects tend to attract the attention of more and more upper-level managers, with the biggest projects getting on the radar screen of the CEO and even the board of directors.

The founder of our company, Obert C. Tanner, was always intimately involved with all of our building projects, no matter how small or large. These were of great interest to him. However, computer software projects, even very large ones, he left to others from whom he expected simple reports of the complex project parameters.

Yet, these not-directly-involved managers, like Obert, don't want to spend a great deal of time studying the status of a project. If a supervisor on the project team isn't

performing, management wants to know this, but doesn't want to spend time and effort ferreting out who is responsible. Whether a part of a project is running behind or is on time, or if a part is over budget, under budget, or on budget—these are things management wants to know. Management wants to know what's going on, who is performing well, who needs help, and what the overall status is of the project.

But—and this is important—they want to know this easily and quickly. Those not directly involved with a project but who have a vested interest in seeing it successfully completed, need to be communicated with in a way that engages them and doesn't waste their time. Long reports, detailed analyses of a project, and extended discussions of what's going on—well, those are almost certain to cause a manager's immediate attention to divert to other pressing issues.


When asked to write a project status report, many project managers produce shallow or incomplete summaries in an attempt to make them short. Many such reports prompt more questions than they answer. In such cases, brevity breeds confusion. The one-page project manager answers more questions than it generates and is brief but sufficient, which is why it is such an effective communication tool.

Yet, when you read all that's written about project management, including all the articles and textbooks with hundreds and hundreds of pages, you'll find very little about how to communicate succinctly and effectively with supervisors who have an interest in a project but are not directly involved. There's lots written about what Kerzner called "communications management,"

but such discussions almost invariably involve how to communicate between members of the project team. Little is written about communicating to corporate management and even less about how to communicate in a way that accommodates management's need for brevity and ease of understanding.

The one-page project manager is a tool that was designed, from the beginning, as a way to engage upper management and make its job easier.