

Don't Try This at Home: Seven Rules to Guarantee Project Failure

By Geoff Choo

Looking for a new way to get really famous--or infamous--at the office? Try these seven money-back guaranteed ways to really mess up your next project.

We're all pretty well acquainted with how we should justify, plan, activate and control projects. Well, let's imagine that we were given permission to screw things up for a change. How would you go about it? I offer you seven guaranteed rules for ensuring the utter and complete failure of your next project. Try these techniques at your own risk.

Rule 1. Deliver, Deliver and Deliver

When in doubt, you only have to remember that your main task in life is to deliver results, no matter what happens. Your motto is, "Sticks and stones may break my team's bones, but I will meet all my milestones." Stay so focused on delivering results that you ignore extraneous things like quality assurance, testing, communications, team management and a little touch of humanity, because all these things only serve to distract you from your main objective of delivering at all costs.

Rule 2. Planning Is for Wimps

Since your firm has really smart system architects and business consultants who create excellent e-business designs, you don't really need all the administrative and financial overhead of planning and controlling your projects. Your e-business designs are so well-thought-out that they will implement themselves, with no need for management intervention. Also, everyone knows that unless you have unusually well-funded projects, stakeholders are often unwilling to foot the bill for project planning and specification. Make yourself a star in your firm by helping to eliminate all those unbillable costs.

Rule 3. Whip Your Team to Higher Performance

The secret to delivering successful results on time and under budget is to work your team as hard as you can. Sleep is for the weak, and it's cheaper to buy coffee than to hire more people. Personally take all the credit for success and blame your team for failures. You only need to gather together all people who aren't currently working on other projects and instruct them to produce, produce and produce. If one of your team members falls sick, isolate that member in a cubicle, and turn up the heat. Since you are expected to have a holistic understanding of what your team members do and how they contribute to your projects, take things to the next level by telling them how to do their jobs. Since you started off as a web designer, you have every right to tell your design team what colour to make the pages and how big the fonts should be.

Rule 4. Communication Is for Losers

All this project management stuff should be obvious to the troops. It's just a matter of applying brainpower where it's needed. If they want clarification, appoint a peon to generate copious amounts of paper. It doesn't matter if the documents don't say anything; the key is to overwhelm any objections with binder upon binder of plans, checklists, reports and spreadsheets. The leader knows best.

Meetings are great for your project, and you should strive to hold meetings with your team at least four or five times a day. Creating meeting agendas are a big waste of time. You just have to go with the flow. Call a meeting, and then ask people what they want to talk about. Randomly discuss issues as they come to mind. If people actually have the gall to start questioning your project designs, become really defensive and start shouting at these "narrow-minded and negative thinkers" who just don't get it.

Rule 5. The Big-Bang Effect

The conventional wisdom in the New Economy states that he who is first to market reaps the most competitive advantage. Therefore you can't afford to waste your time with staged implementations and iterative cycles. All these things take up too much time and just add unnecessary administrative overhead. As the universe was created with one Big Bang, execute your project in one Big Step. Push your team to relentlessly generate deliverables without taking a moment to look at what you are actually doing. You can always go back and fix your problems later. The critical factor is to keep generating deliverables.

Rule 6. Common Sense Rules!

Thinking of getting a formal education in project management? You don't really need to know all that mumbo-jumbo about Gantt charts, WBS (is that a new wrestling league?) and cost analysis. All you really need is good old common sense, good instincts and your lucky rabbit's foot. What is it going to take to launch a mission-critical enterprise-level project? I just need to throw plenty of smart bodies at the project, push them to work 20-hour days, and then just wait for the deliverables to start coming out.

Rule 7. Rub Your Clients the Right Way

Since the New Economy revolves around the concept of creating a premium customer experience, you want to make sure that you take every possible step to satisfy every client request, no matter how stupid, frivolous or long it delays your project. They want to change the whole layout of the site three days before launch? Sure, no problem. All you have to do is to refocus your resources, randomly re-assign people from other tasks and squeeze your project team even harder, making sure that you extract every last ounce of energy. Then squeeze some more.

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