



A Project Manager With A Life?

5 Essential Steps to PM Bliss

Why do we find the idea of “A Project Manager With a Life” so difficult to believe? You’re most likely smiling at the thought of this seemingly contrary idea. As a PM, why do you think you might find it inconceivable? Because we all have an age-old image of the harried PM, first into the office each day, last to leave, and experiencing constant chaos in between. And what’s worse, when we sign up as a PM, voluntarily or not, we routinely assume that we will be leaving our real lives behind as we step in our PM harness. Why do we do this to ourselves? And, more importantly, how can we avoid doing it in the future?

Let’s start at the beginning. What is a life? For those of you who have been denying yourselves, let’s start

with a working definition: “A person’s life is a well-balanced mix of those ingredients he/she finds necessary to be fully engaged in his/her pursuit of happiness.” Simple, huh? Regardless of your own definition, here are a few things to think about to help you get closer to following your own bliss.

1. UNDERSTAND THE FUNDAMENTAL NEEDS OF YOUR LIFE

Write down your real needs and put them where you’ll see them every day. Ask yourself, “What can I *not* live without?” For example, my list would include things like: time every week to be with my elderly parents, Friday nights out with my spouse, daily roll on the floor with my dog, swim four to five times per week, occasional family

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WOLF CONSULTING
DIANE VASARKOVY
OWNER/CONSULTANT
360.264.5082
CELL: 360.789.3626
VASARKOVY@AOL.COM
WWW.WOLF-MARK.COM

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picnics, time away from doing my business for running my business, several hours per quarter lost in watercolor painting, significant vacations away from work...etc. Be as specific as possible with truly important things. When you understand what is important to your life, you are more apt to arrange your world so that you get it.

2. WHEN YOU CREATE A WORK BREAKDOWN STRUCTURE FOR YOUR PROJECTS, BE SURE YOU ARE NOT SCHEDULED AS A RESOURCE FOR ANYTHING OTHER THAN PURE PM TASKS

You are *not* the backup analyst, architect, coder or tester. You ARE managing the project, that is a full time job. Assign all project efforts to your project team from the start or you'll wind up with a hidden effort that guilt will drive you to do yourself. This doesn't mean you can't step in if the situation demands. Just don't plan that in from the start.

3. REMEMBER THAT EFFORT DOES NOT EQUAL CALENDAR

Before committing to your target date, block out all known (and natural) interruptions of work...like vacations! Then use a reasonable productivity factor to get to your "person day" standard. Is six hours a day too much? Are your team members 100% dedicated to the project? Be conservative in your estimation of how much of them as a resource you can reasonably expect. If your team has a schedule that is reasonable, then so will you. They want their lives too. And later in the work if you need to get more from

yourselves because of something unexpected, you will have energy reserves to apply.

4. DO NOT OWN ISSUES OUTSIDE OF YOUR CONTROL AS PM

You may be concerned about them. They may be risks to your project, but get the resolution quickly into the hands of someone who does have control. Sponsor? Other stakeholder? Raise the visibility of risk and potential impact. Start using language that shows the external dependence. Try preset contingency meetings. "In case we don't get resolution by 12/3/07, we have scheduled a workshop on 12/2/07 to adjust the plan accordingly." The issue resolution person should be more nervous than you.

5. NEVER, NEVER, NEVER EVER VOLUNTEER FOR A DEATH MARCH

You were looking for a job when you took this one. Why do we all too often accept assignments that we know are doomed going in? Be explicit with your Sponsor about what you need to make this project succeed, and stand firm all project long. Be prepared to turn it down and walk away... or, accept accountability for doing yourself in. You want to be a mono-maniac with a mission: *To succeed with this project where a major component of success is that all participants also had lives during the project term, including you!* 🐺

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