



Making Real Things Happen

By Tammé Quinn Grzebyk

Several of my clients and peers have asked me recently about how to get past the planning of a project and into the implementation phase. I find this especially prevalent when the project is neither client- nor manager-driven. This is an interesting phenomenon - the fact that people are spending so much time planning, but cannot seem to get to the "doing" part. In fact, this time of year is probably the worst for setting a load of goals and meeting few of them.

Since the main purpose of my business is to help companies implement changes among their people and processes, I began thinking of the activities we use with our clients. It became clear to me that a reward upon project completion can certainly aid in making it successful (on-time, on-budget, on-scope). I imagine it's a lot easier for all of us to complete projects for our clients or our managers. After all, in addition to the satisfaction of helping make and improvement, a final payment for the services provided or a pat on the back from the boss usually follows a successful project.

But, what happens when the project is internal or self-developed - where your manager didn't request it or the client hasn't yet bought it? For example, I regularly research new methodologies that can help companies. When I come up with a new idea that I know will be successful among businesses, I have to then develop the program which often includes training. With all the other tasks, events and activities that come my way, a project like that can easily get pushed to the wayside. Only after I implement the program with a client will I receive any reward, so other things seem to bubble up as more important. So, to get me past the planning and successfully into the implementation, I have found the following most helpful.

Determine an expected completion date

Once you determine what it is that you want to achieve, assign a date for completion. Otherwise, the plan will end up right alongside that plan to "organize the basement" - which, if you're like me, never seems to happen.

Establish milestones

After assigning a completion date, it's important to define the dates certain tasks will be completed leading up to the final date. If you decide you want to find a new job by July, but don't have the milestones leading up to that, it will be difficult to achieve. Define all the steps that must take place: update résumé, research companies that might need your expertise, begin networking in the right circles, get trained in the areas you think you might need, etc.

Turn each milestone into a mini-project

Break each of these milestones down to an even greater degree. If, for example, your big plan is to get a new job as a project manager, a milestone may be to become certified as a project manager by the Project Management Institute. Break this down into: research training certification locations; earmark funds to pay for certification, schedule time to get the training, schedule a test date, etc.

Carve out time in your schedule

Take into account all the others things that get in the way of getting things done. I find that for big projects, it's best to schedule time each week to work on it. Don't check email or phone messages for a few hours, and simply work on the project at-hand. If you think you do not have the time to carve out, then look at the whether this is important enough, or if it is, in fact, more like "organizing the basement."

Post the plan

It's always easier to achieve a goal or complete a project if the plan is in plain site. Put reminders on your calendar, hang posters on the wall, or do whatever it is that will keep your plan top-of-mind. I can look up from my monitor at any given time and see our goal for each quarter of 2008. Next to each goal, I have an action plan for achieving them, and I cross out each task as I complete it. Do what works for you.

Share the plan

Make sure colleagues, peers, partners, and mentors know your plan, along with the expected completion date. Share with them your progress. If you belong to a mastermind group, you already recognize that implementing becomes a lot easier. If you do not, you can find out more about how these can help you by visiting www.themastermindinstitute.com. It's just another way to keep us accountable and achieving big things!

Determine your reward

Internal projects sometimes do not seem to offer much reward upon completion, so we do not place much urgency on them. So, give yourself and your team something for finishing. Look at the expected completion date, and plan a celebration to follow. Postpone the celebration each time the completion date is missed.

It's so easy to talk about implementing. It's even easier to talk about how hard it is to get anything done. If we each replaced this wasted time with actual implementation, just think of how stresses would decrease and accomplishments would soar!

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