

Compass

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Schedule Chicken

Why did the rubber chicken attend the project status meeting? To get to the other side of one of the most powerful forces known to project management: the game of Schedule Chicken!

One project manager brings a rubber chicken (you know, the slapstick comedy kind) to status meetings. He brings it to acknowledge the cost of less than full disclosure. He says the rubber chicken reminds participants that they can discuss the difficult issues.

He wouldn't try to manage a project without it.

Schedule Chicken is played in many high-expectation corporate cultures. It is seen as a way of protecting individuals from the effects of disclosing the status of their piece of a project. It may protect individuals in the short run but it cannot help but damage the project in the long run. This eventual damage leaves successful players blameless and their project in ruins.

Schedule Chicken Rules:

The game is for two or more players.

The object of the game is to deflect blame for schedule slips.

Play:

In project status meetings, wait for someone else to report that THEIR piece of the project has slipped. If their schedule slip is of equal or greater magnitude than your unreported slip, simply deliver your piece of the project before they deliver theirs, and no one ever has to know that your piece would have delayed the schedule, too.

Strategy:

- Play it cool. The best players maintain a reputation for under-promising and over-delivering and this requires a strategic view. Deflect inquiries about progress on interim deliverables by focusing upon strategic milestones. They're usually so distant and fuzzy that no individual can be held accountable for meeting or missing them.
- Advise. Offer your helpful advice to those hapless souls trapped with a publicly slipping schedule, even though following your advice could expose you. (Remember, these people are chicken. They won't

follow your advice.)

- Defer. Always defer to others. Give them your place in line. "Oh, no, I gave my status first last time," is a useful phrase.



Commentary on the game of Schedule Chicken:

The next best thing to being on time is knowing early that you'll be late. Projects that reward only on-time performance for each component may be creating a "Lake Wobegone Syndrome" (named after Garrison Keillor's mythical midwestern town where "all the women are

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strong, the men are good-looking, and the children are above average.") where every piece of the project is expected to perform above average.

This can make playing schedule chicken seem safer than disclosing early a perfectly reasonable below average performance. (Remember that in every population *except* Lake Wobegone's, all of the children perform below average at least some of the time.)

The unrealistic expectations in high-expectation cultures create the perfect medium for nourishing Schedule Chicken. Realistic expectations are unrealistic expectations tempered with wisdom. When a hole appears in their boat, wise captains focus upon plugging rather than punishing the hole.

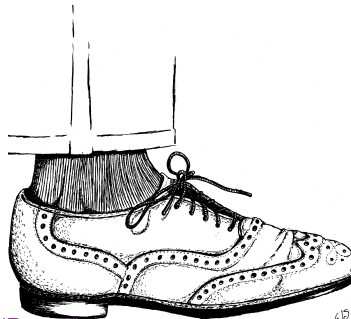
What can't be discussed can't be fixed. Because there is no safety in keeping your own counsel on projects, candid reporting must be honored and rewarded.

Finally, accept no small slips. Limit the number of times you go to the well. Projects always execute more disjointedly than planned, so it's often unclear how a small reported slip affects the overall schedule. Track by the inch, assess by the yard, and adjust by the mile. Adjust the formal schedule only when a significant milestone is clearly threatened *and* you have a better strategy. The alternative is the sort of churning which takes too much administrative time and provides the perfect incubator for hatching the schedule chicken. das

"When a hole appears in their boat, wise captains focus

upon plugging rather than punishing the hole."

The Preacher's Shoe



*"But, oh!
with what sad certainty our spirits
would subside*

*When Deacon Frisbee sprinkled ashes
where we used to slide!"*

Eugene Field, Poems of Childhood

I recently spent a day interviewing in preparation for a customized two-day workshop. Those of you who interview as part of your work understand that the interviewing process is as much an opportunity to share information as gather it, and this day was no exception. I was hoping specifically to start developing the rapport essential to delivering any successful workshop.

I noticed, though, that the first ten minutes or so of each interview was spent in an uncomfortable dance. I searched my experiences to find a correlate to the feeling I was feeling and came up with a surprising image. The image was the likeness of a preacher's shoe.

When I was a kid, my family had a lovely terra-cotta wall hanging of a topless native woman carrying a jug on her head. It was a beautiful Art Deco piece, but when the preacher's shoe hit the

front porch, the native woman retreated into a drawer. It would just not do for the minister to discover this likeness of a naked woman hanging on our wall.

Snapping back to the interview, I recognized that my presence must feel to my client like the preacher's presence felt to my family. "Please don't criticize us for our less than reverent life," their actions seemed to say. I then took the first opportunity to demonstrate that I was not there to judge them, and that I was swimming in the same messy soup they were swimming in. Only after I'd made my intentions clear did the interview start to cover the real business at hand.

This was a lesson for me. When I introduce myself as a project management consultant, my client might reasonably believe that I'm there to force my particular brand of snake oil down their throat. When I am seen as an expert in my field, I should anticipate that this designation might leave my client feeling one-down and vulnerable. The vulnerable are protected from change within their silence.

If I want to do my clients any good, I have to help us both get over our instinctive reaction to the sound of a preacher's shoe on the porch. das

David's Note:

Hi, for those of you who don't yet know me, I'm David A. Schmaltz, President of True North pgs, Inc.

This newsletter is my attempt to pay back the community that has enabled me to do what I love to do.

The last two months have been learning-rich for me, as I attended the Weinberg and Weinberg Change Shop as an associate and completed yet another stint as a facilitator for Problem Solving Leadership Workshop. True North enters its second year a fully fledged success. Thanks for your support! das

Mastering Projects Workshop

An alternate vision to project management

Whether you manage projects or support those who do, you need to know about Mastering Projects Workshop (MPW), a three-day seminar providing the essential skills that spell project success.

Who can master projects? Everyone from first-time project managers to veterans - even those who must manage projects without having the title of project manager can master their projects.

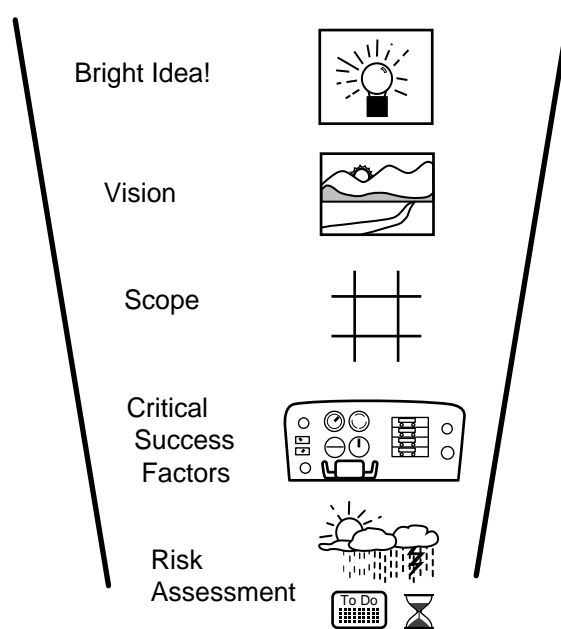
MPW teaches what the world's most successful project managers understand - how you can unlock the potential within your project by helping each participant find their project within your project!

"I came expecting training and I left with an education."

Leading through power is a self-defeating act - The days of generating results by wielding authority are over. Today, the game is won by those who can elicit cooperation and build the relationships that bind together a project community.

What tells you your project is successful? On time? Within budget? Meets specification? Mastering Projects shows how the quality of each participant's experience translates directly into project success; how your project can be successful without sacrificing any one's humanity. Would your present project team choose to work together again? If not, look out!

There are tricks of the trade, but these tricks are not the trade. The most successful projects aren't those with the best PERT or Gantt chart. The most successful projects result from the simple power of



a shared vision:

- of the objective,
- of the process,
- of the reasons why this project is important.

This shared vision creates a more self-managing project community - one more naturally committed to pursuing common targets.

"I've never attended a workshop where we really talked about the issues that dictate success on a project. I'll never be able to look at the jerks on my project in the same way again!"

Success doesn't lie in becoming a slave to your project. A more self-managing project means the project's manager has less to do. Mastering Projects Workshop shows you how to succeed by concentrating on less - not more!

MPW teaches skills that make a team work well on this project, then want to work together again by:

Planning projects within uncertain futures

Grounding bright ideas to create a common objective

Creating understandable and maintainable project schedules

Gaining support without overwhelming yourself

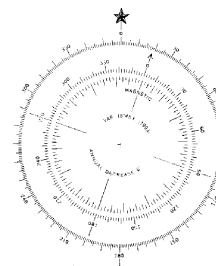
Creating reasonable boundaries around your project

Creating projects that align with your organization's values

"This isn't just the best Project Management seminar I've attended, it's the best seminar I've attended!"

MPW will give you the ability to teach yourself how to become the project manager you'd like to become by providing tools and techniques and a framework within which to use them. You will leave the workshop with a more manageable current project and a fresh perspective to apply to every future one.

Warning: Attending MPW will significantly increase both the success and the quality of the experience of participants and their project community members. This effect may impact the entire organization.



Notices:

Upcoming Problem Solving Workshops:
June 2-7 Mt Crested Butte, CO

September 15-21 Mt Crested Butte, CO

Contact Suzi Brame at Wk: (503) 721-0908 or Fx: (503) 226-9066 for details.

No public Mastering Projects Workshops are scheduled at this time due to the volume of private workshop bookings. Call if you're interested in sponsoring a semi-private workshop or in sitting in on an otherwise private session.

About Compass

Compass is published quarterly by True North pgs, Inc., and is distributed free of charge to a project-oriented community.

*I've created *Compass* as a navigation aid for continuing your process of becoming a project manager. *Compass* shares stories and insights to serve as the basis for you to provide more effective project leadership to you and your team. It is through sharing our stories and our insights that we enable each other to improve the quality of our project experiences.*

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David A. Schmaltz, President
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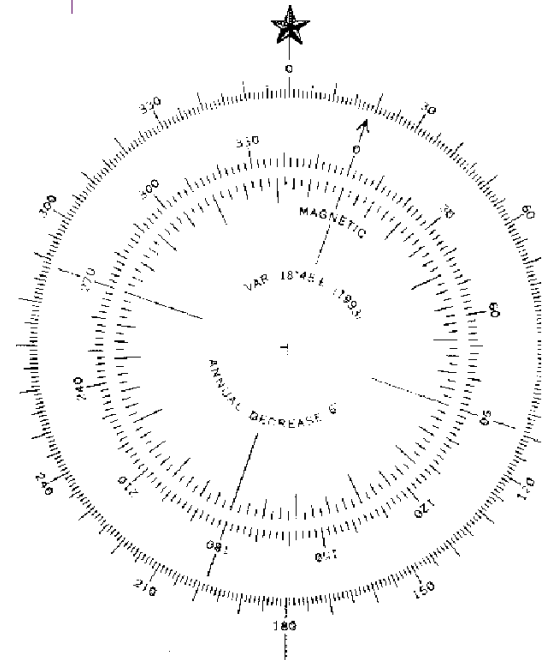
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**“You are the most powerful
project management tool
you will ever use.”**



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Quandary of Systems Analysts

With apologies to James Lipton's "An Exaltation of Larks".

Vocabulary is an important part of gaining professional mastery. Before one can "walk the walk", one must learn to "talk the talk". And talking the talk is complicated by profession-specific terms. Each profession seems to have a fiendish ability to assign unique meanings to otherwise ordinary terms. I'm often surprised by the unique use an accountant or a particle physicist applies to some otherwise innocent adjective or generic gerund. It's a very successful barrier to entry. If you want to participate, you've got to learn their language.

Project management is no exception. Don't think for a minute that your project team isn't quietly critiquing your usage whenever you open your mouth or transmit an e-mail. Shortcomings are most apparent in the misuse of plural expressions. As James Lipton noted in his *Exaltation of Larks*, British aristocracy could be brutal in their punishment for misuse of what they called terms of "venery" and what we might call plurals. What you call a collection of systems analysts can declare your mastery of the more tangible tools and techniques of project management.

I submit the following as a reference for the uninitiated. Study well, aspirants. Your mastery of this list may become the difference between credibility and

1. An Exaltation of Larks or, The Venereal Game by James Lipton © 1968, 1977 by Penguin Books, Middlesex, England.

come down.

A quandary of systems analysts.

A blame of schedule slips.

A fantasy of slack time.

A hollow promise of resources.

A bust of Critical Success Factors.

An blind of vision statements.

A slip of schedules.

A wake of deadlines.

A cluster of team work.

A downside of risks.

A quarry of milestones.

A liberation of dependencies.

A knot of scheduling tools.

A broke of Work Breakdown Structures.

A damned lie of Status Reports.

A hatch of project plans.

A rope of Team Building.

A maze of phases.

A float of critical paths.

A confusion of project team members.

An enlightenment of technical gurus.

Another bright idea of marketing executives.

A creep of product features.

A debit (or credit) of project accountants.

A worry of project sponsors.

A fuzz of customer requirements.

A fickle of customers.

A Deming of QA technicians.

A rejection of tech writers.

A dump of software engineers.

A short of electrical engineers.

A run of manufacturing engineers.

A mystery of executives.

Lipton notes six classifications of venereal expressions:

Onomatopoeia: A Gaggle of Geese

Characteristic: A Leap of Leopards

Appearance: A Bouquet of Pheasants

Habit: A Nest of Rabbits

Comment: A Cowardice of Curs

Error: A School (originally a shoal) of Fish

I leave to the reader the classification of the above additions to this proud lexicon. I also encourage the reader to submit additional venereals to our rich vocabulary. It is through this sharing that we expand the boundaries of our common mastery of this challenging profession. das

What Is True North pgs, Inc.?

True North pgs (project guidance strategies), Inc. is a Portland, Oregon-based project management training and consulting firm dedicated to developing and sharing ideas that support the following tenets:

You are the most powerful project management tool you will ever use.

The key to managing projects effectively is to create self-managing projects.

The key to creating self-managing projects is to encourage open system behavior within the project community.

Project work is more effective when it's fun.

True North pgs designed the Mastering Projects Workshop and the Sun Microsystems' Managing Projects@Sun course to teach these basic skills to people who are assigned to manage projects as a part of the rest of their work, even though they do not share the title, authority, or career goals of a project manager.

Predictive and Adaptive

"If I think of myself as needing to be perfect, chances are I will always be able to find imperfection."

Virginia Satir - *The New Peoplemaking*
I received a comment on a feature of the first edition (V1, N1) of *Compass* from correspondent Steven D. Jackson down in Austin, Texas. Steven said he was having a hard time convincing his clients that the Mastering Projects Workshop was worthwhile because some copies of the newsletter were distributed after the date of the advertised open enrollment class. The comments ran along the lines of, "What kind of a project management consultant and trainer is he if he can't even get his newsletter distributed on time?"

Good question! Each of us struggle with the desire to be predictive and the sometimes conflicting requirement to be adaptive. All of us fuss over some of the compromises we must make to complete our project work. Often, a few loose ends are left unresolved. Sometimes, larger compromises are required.

When I first came up with the idea of True North pgs, I consulted an ancient oracle called the I Ching for advice. The response was a wonderful description of project management.

The Arousing

"The shaman intends to originate in order to experience completion. In completion there is the basis of the new as what is ended is replaced by what has not yet been.

The world is unpredictable as it manifests change in every detail. The shaman, originating according to intention, cannot know what has been initiated since what is originated must change as it takes place within the world of

change. The originator cannot know what it will become, and will not find it becoming what was desired or expected. As it evolves, it bears witness to what the seeker does not see, showing the effect of forces the seeker does not know or understand.

If the shaman demands conformance to the original desire or expectation, he or she will be confounded and so lose the opportunity to learn. However, contemplating what happens and accepting full responsibility for it, the seeker may discover something of his or her own becoming."

Marshall Pease in the Aquarian I Ching

What I discovered of my own becoming in producing the first edition of *Compass* was that when faced with the choice of something or nothing, I will, like every excellent project manager, choose something. As the ancient oracle reminds us, project management is not whether we successfully predict the outcome or, by extension, if it all fits together in the end. Success is our ability to understand the unfolding purpose for which the effort would have been intended had the community been wise and all-seeing enough at the beginning to predict such things, and then to adapt as required to satisfy this "higher" purpose. Often, with warts and all.

The pursuit of perfection can do more than destroy the quality of my experience, it's more likely to destroy my project than any other action I take. To answer Steven's



client's question, this is the kind of project management trainer and consultant I am. das

"The pursuit of perfection can do more than destroy the quality of my experience, it's more likely to destroy my project than any other action I take."

Appreciations:

Nike ATE Group for your tenacious application of your newest technology for managing their projects.

NextLink Interactive for dealing with your dilemmas differently.

Griggs-Anderson Research for your Performance Tuning project and your survey on the effectiveness of the Mastering Projects Workshop.

My Managing Projects@Sun Classes for effective camel-herding and for taking charge of the quality of your own experience.

Michael Douglas and Steve Gibson for considering the idea that 'on time, on budget, on spec' might not only be an unrealistic objective but might be the root of the problem.

Dani and Jerry Weinberg, Jean McClenden, Jean Dagenais, and Rick Brenner for their help in changing my life.

Nancy Hiller for your naive interest in corporate training.

Kathy Carey for your help with editing and layout.

Wilder Schmaltz for the graphics.

Northwest Printing for creating the chart stationary.

"The most important things tend to come at the least convenient times." das