

One Simple Thing To Improve Projects or PM

Featuring the insights of:



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... and more than 35 other veteran PM contributors!

**Collected by Michael Greer,
The Project Management Minimalist**

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Introduction

One day in November, 2011 I posted an invitation to visitors to my web site to share “one simple thing...” that could improve projects and/or project management (PM). Many smart people with lots of different experiences working with project teams took the time to think about, then respond to, this invitation. This document is a summary of these responses as of February 8, 2012.

My heartfelt “Thanks!” to all those who were kind enough to create and share their thoughtful responses to this challenge! Below is the original invitation as it appeared as a blog post on my website, [Michael Greer’s PM Resources](#). —
Mike Greer

[Original Invitation] One Simple Thing to Improve Projects & Project Management

I'm a PM Minimalist and I'm on a quest! I'm looking for answers to this question:

**What's one simple thing that can improve projects and/or project management?
Specifically...**

- * What tool...?
- * What "best practice..." ?
- * What change in the workplace... ?
- * What senior management support...?
- * What "one little thing..."

... can improve projects or project management?

I Want to Hear From You!

If reading that question above starts your brain's synapses firing, then I want to hear from you! If you are a weary and battle-scarred **project manager (or project team member)** who has a clear vision for making PM better, then I want to hear from you! If you're a **PM expert, consultant, author, or PM product developer** who has "seen it all" and you "know one thing for sure," then I want to hear from you! ...

This is a Work in Progress, So Help Me Shape It!

What you see above is about as far as I've taken this concept so far. But I've got a feeling "in my bones" that this is really worth pursuing. What's more, I know from decades of running custom PM training sessions in all sorts of industries that **there is much wisdom out there that has yet to be captured** in all those formal PM textbooks and competency guidelines.

Finally, I know that when you ask a seasoned PM veteran or insightful PM newbie to name that "one thing" that will make things better, something magical happens. Their brains start to churn, their unique life experiences kick in and they start finding and filtering ideas drawn from their PM wars. What emerges is their unique wisdom. And **that's what I know we can capture and collect here.**

Next Steps

Post your *Comment* below or ***email*** your idea for a featured blog post, video, etc. to pm.minimalist@gmail.com. I look forward to hearing from you!



Kelly Kazimer's One Simple Thing: Time Diamonds!

*(The following article is part of our [One Simple Thing...to Improve Projects](#) series. It was contributed by **Kelly Kazimer**. Kelly is a certified Project Management Professional and thought leader in social project management at [Upstart Industries](#), creator of [Vantage: The Social Approach to Project Management](#). You can follow Kelly on [Twitter at @klkaz](#) & learn more about [Vantage \(@projectvantage\)](#) at <http://projectvantage.com>.)*

In a recent blog post, Michael Greer posed a very interesting question: “**What is one simple thing that can improve projects and/or project management?**” He just had to include that one, small, troublesome word: **simple**. If he had only omitted it, then this would be a far simpler article to write.

I could easily list tools, techniques, best practices, lessons learned, and so on and so forth that can improve project delivery and management. But **the phrasing of the question, and the focus on deconstructing the seemingly complex project world into something sensible and attainable, made me pause.**



Another challenging, and therefore interesting, aspect of **the question is that it strives to achieve community**. The question is not confined to specific types of projects (IT, organizational change, process improvement, etc), nor is it focused on specific types of organizations (consulting, insurance, retail, construction, health-care, financial, etc). So Michael is basically asking, of all of the types and size of projects and initiatives possible, in all of the types and sizes of businesses and organizations out there, what is the one simple thing that could make them better? Not asking for much, are you Michael?

In all seriousness, **I love this question. I love it because it forces us to think about what projects are all about;** what they require; what makes them work; what makes them flop; and what absolutely essential ingredients are at the heart of every single one. Because isn't knowing the recipe half of the battle?

Every project, no matter how large or small, exists to achieve a goal. Often, they seek to achieve many goals, but always with an overreaching objective. And work needs to happen in order to reach that goal. So **we bundle up the work, call it a project, and begin a journey.**

I've taken many of these journeys over the course of my career, and I spend a large portion of every day thinking about them. What are the "keys" to making them successful? Why and how do they get tangled up? How do we begin a journey down a straightforward well-lit path, only to sometimes find ourselves lost in a dark and confusing forest?

And **so now I offer my meager contribution to "one simple thing."** Alas, it is not an out-of-the-box tool; nor is it a perfectly acceptable copy-and-paste template. My one simple thing that would improve every project, for everyone involved, is really a perspective or philosophy which asks you to think of time as currency. **Stop viewing time as an infinite resource, and begin seeing it for the precious, non-renewable resource that it is.** Once you **begin thinking in terms of time diamonds**, your project journey and the actions you need to take to complete it are given a shimmering light of clarity.

In reviewing some of my personal experiences, and some stories I've heard from colleagues, one resounding theme emerged - the preciousness of time. Not in the most obvious sense, in terms of the project's deadline, or "we need to achieve X and only have so much time to do so." Those pressures certainly underlie every project, whether professional or personal. But beyond the obvious, **the concept of time valuation pops up again and again throughout project work:**

Once you begin thinking in terms of *time diamonds*, your project journey and the actions you need to take to complete it are given a shimmering light of clarity.

- "We wasted so much time going down a path that turned out to be the wrong one"
- "If only we'd spent more time understanding our requirements and objectives up

front"

- "I spend so much time in meetings, I never get anything done"
- "I'm already working 12 hours a day, how much more time can I be expected to give?"

Now imagine if the project manager, or project owner, or project executive began thinking in terms of time diamonds. Time as a precious commodity. Not just their time, but your time; your team's time; everybody's time. Imagine the impact to assumptions, actions, and requests. **Understanding the precious value of time**, and always keeping it top of mind of everyone involved in the project **could change the above statements to:**

- "Let's invest X number of time diamonds qualifying whether we should take that path"
- "If we spend X number of time diamonds now understanding our objectives, it should save us this many time diamonds overall"
- "Will this meeting produce an outcome of equal or greater value than the number of time diamonds it's spending?"
- "I need to spend my time diamonds more wisely. My investment isn't paying off"

Viewing every aspect of a project through a filter which constantly evaluates it's time value helps steer you towards the items that matter. Those that keep you close to

that straight-and-narrow and well-lit path that you stepped onto when you began your journey. That journey of a project, that bundle of work that needs to get done to reach your goals. Because at the end of day, it's as simple as that.



Stacy Pearson's One Simple Thing: The Project Debrief Session

*(The following article is part of our [One Simple Thing...to Improve Projects](#) series. It was contributed by **Stacy Pearson**. Stacy is a volunteer, mom, and project manager. She is also the founder of [The Blogunteer](#) - a blog that is dedicated to inspiring volunteerism by highlighting the many organizations already out there making a difference and individuals who give their time. You can follow **Stacy Pearson on Twitter** at http://twitter.com/stacy_pearson.)*

At the end of a project, many of us just want to be done. We may already have a new thing to move onto, we may be happy that some project frustrations will go away, or we may just look forward to an end of project celebration.

One item that is often overlooked is a **project debrief session to gather lessons learned**. The lessons learned should be captured at the end of the project or project phase by all stakeholders involved. This could be **a series of interviews, a group discussion, a survey or some combination of these**. Some projects may see value in a facilitated debrief session to gather feedback and keep the peace between participants.



The key to the debrief process is to document and summarize what worked well and what could be improved, then share those findings within your organization so that future projects (and project managers) can learn from successes or opportunities.

To learn more, you can find a variety of templates and articles on debrief sessions online. One article from the PMI blog describes how you can implement a lessons learned methodology in your organization

(http://blogs.pmi.org/blog/voices_on_project_management/2009/03/lessons-learned.html).

There are also many free lessons learned templates online for you to utilize.

(Editor's note: See also [Project "Post-Mortem" Review Questions](#) on this website.)



Lindsay Chaffee's One Simple Thing: Change Control

*(The following article is part of our [One Simple Thing...to Improve Projects](#) series. It was contributed by **Lindsay Chaffee, PMP**. Lindsay is a certified Project Management Professional and lives in the beautiful mountains of Colorado. She is an avid skier and reader, as well as a loving wife and mother. Lindsay works as an Implementations Project Manager for Innovest Systems, LLC, a financial technology firm that provides technology-driven solutions to trust and wealth management companies.*

You can **follow Lindsay on Twitter**

at [@Project Mom](#) and learn more about Innovest Systems, LLC ([@InnovestSystems](#)) at <http://InnovestSystems.com>)

Change is inevitable in projects. The word “change” can lead to misunderstandings, since it has so many meanings. However, the most common usage in projects refers to change as a change in scope. In this sense, scope change means a modification to the project’s original, agreed-upon scope and objectives in order to accommodate a need that was not originally defined.

I believe that **one simple thing that a Project Manager and Project Team can do to improve their project is to fully define and buy into a change control strategy right from the start of the project** – before any changes have been identified.

Change Control (or Change Management) refers to the management process of requesting, reviewing, approving (or declining/deferring), then carrying out and controlling changes to the project’s deliverables. By defining and implementing a change control plan before it’s actually needed, the project team is more likely to handle changes smoothly and successfully.

Typically, **a change control plan will outline exactly how to proceed (what actions to take) when a change in scope is encountered.** This plan should be captured somewhere, such as in the Project Management Document, so that it is easily accessible to all team members. This same reference should also include a clear statement of the initially agreed-upon project scope. Both must be understood in order to effectively utilize change control. After all, if you don’t have a baseline for comparison, how can you know if something is in or out of scope and if change control is necessary?



Once a change to scope is identified, the change control plan should outline what to do next. In most instances this would involve reviewing the item and comparing it to the rest of the project work to determine what impact accepting the new scope item will have on the project as a whole. **The change control plan should also include criteria for accepting or declining a new scope request.** For example, consider asking this question: “If this request is accepted will it change the critical path?”

Allowing a change in scope usually means added cost, greater risk and longer duration. In order for a project to succeed, rigorous change control must be practiced. As a part of the change control process the change should be reviewed to determine all positive and negative impacts of the change, ensuring that all parties are able to assess the overall impacts of the change.

Scope change is not necessarily bad. For example, some changes may ultimately optimize the benefits generated by the project. In addition, change requests may capture lessons learned so they can be applied to future projects.

The change management process must be seen as a partnership in order to succeed. **Success is more likely when everyone understands and values the tracking of changes and supports a formal Change Control process.** Change control is a tenant of good customer service and good project management because it provides a customer with an accurate accounting of what was really provided for the time and money invested in the project.



Luis Seabra Coelho's One Simple Thing: Common Sense

(The following article is part of our [One Simple Thing...to Improve Projects](#) series. It was contributed by [Luis Seabra Coelho](#). Luis blogs about Project Management on [Ah-Ha-Moments](#) and he is particularly interested in the links between businesses and Project Management - and his blog reflects that. His professional career spanned over several industries ranging from banking to health care, mainly on

the IT area. He is currently working for a procurement company that is part of a top Portuguese holding.

Luis started his professional career as a Math graduate working on software development, then moved to IT and he was then just a step away from Project Management. So it was natural for him to get certifications like the Project Management Professional and business related post graduations. And all that helped to set up his most public work to date, the [Ah-Ha-Moments blog](#). You can follow Luis' Tweets at <https://twitter.com/@lseabra>).

"Common sense" was my immediate answer to Michael Greer when he first challenged me to answer this simple - but not easy to answer - question. This turned out a longer answer than the one Michael requested, so I adapted it to give you 2 options: you can read the bullets for the shorter version or the complete text for a more complete answer.

1. Common sense is a cultural belief based on perception.

The first thing to do is to make sure we all have the same understanding of "common sense" and a good place to start is a dictionary. So I looked it up on the two online dictionaries used the most and came up with:

- "Sound and prudent judgment based on a simple perception of the situation or facts" (in Merriam-Webster)
- "Ordinary sensible understanding; one's basic intelligence which allows for plain understanding and without which good decisions or judgments cannot be made." (in Wiktionary)

In short, you'll find the following associated to common sense:

- prudent judgment - as in playing safe
- basic intelligence, simple perception, plain understanding - not an explanation of reality
- sensible understanding - based on the senses, not reasoning

- perception - which implies that different people and cultures may have a different "common sense"

2. In favor to common sense we have:

a) Project Management is based on common sense.

We have been doing projects for thousands of years with just a little bit more than common sense - and thus the argument that common sense is the one simple thing to improve Project Management. I'd bet that the Egyptians that built the Pyramids didn't know the first thing about Monte Carlo simulations or soft skills. But they managed all right, didn't they?

b) Common sense is practical.

And nowadays it's not all that different. Common sense still rules Project Management, even if you have to master a lot of different skills and knowledge. **It's all too easy for a Project Manager to get lost in cost-benefit analysis, Earned Value Management, leads & lags, Gantt charts and Responsibility Assignment Matrixs (and any other Project Management jargon you can remember) and lose sight of the obvious.** Common sense plays the key role of, at the very least, reminding you that you have something to deliver.

PM is based on common sense... the Egyptians that built the Pyramids didn't know the first thing about Monte Carlo simulations or soft skills. But they managed all right, didn't they?

When you lose track of that you usually get in trouble: how many stories have you heard about

companies that put a price on human lives and got burned because of it? You just can't put a price on everything because we all consider some things priceless but then you think: "cost-benefit analysis is too good to waste so we should do it on each and every occasion we get." And this way **we lose time by being busy with something that doesn't help us make the right decision and can even support us with some beautiful PowerPoint slides and reasoning on making the wrong decision.**

3. But watch out for:

a) Project Management is more than just Common Sense.

First of all I have to emphasize that Project Management requires more than just common sense - so don't think that common sense is enough for you to work and prosper as a Project Manager.

b) Common sense doesn't explain reality.

Still... Common sense told us that the Sun orbits the Earth.

Then we have another fact: common sense can misguide us. Common sense told us that the Sun orbits the Earth. It tells us that if a

project is late we can add more people. It tells us that if we stick to our plan it will come true. These statements are (or were) all common sense but they are also false.

c) Common sense is cultural.

There's also the fact that common sense is cultural so people around you feel and think about the same as you do. Common sense is not of much help when you need creativity, innovation or just thinking outside the box.

d) Common sense never proves anything.

And common sense is made of beliefs, not proofs -- because in most cases it pays to believe something and act quickly upon the reality with just that rather than invest time and effort in exploring to reach a conclusion. If you have any doubts on this one, just ask people you work with in what position should new born babies sleep. You probably won't expect the variety of answers I'm sure you'll get.



Michele McDonough's One Simple Thing: Question the “Obvious”

(The following article is part of our [One Simple Thing...to Improve Projects](#) series. It was contributed by Michele McDonough. Michele has a background in education, project management and mathematics, and she is currently a contributing writer and editor to [Bright Hub's Business area](#). You can follow Michele and the rest of the [Bright Hub Project Management](#) team on Twitter at [@BrightHub_PM](#) or on Michele's personal page on [Google+](#).

Several years ago, when I was teaching a critical thinking course, I began a class by writing the following sentence on the blackboard:

There are more traffic-related fatalities during the winter than other seasons.

I asked the class to tell me why they thought this was true. For the most part, everyone said the same thing – they blamed it on the weather. After just a minute or two of discussion, the entire class agreed that not only did it make sense for more accidents to occur when it was snowing or when the roads were icy, but it also seemed logical that these winter accidents would be more severe than those that occurred during the summer.

I walked back to the chalkboard and changed one word in the sentence. The new sentence stated:

There are more traffic-related fatalities during the summer than other seasons.

A few people grumbled and a few others giggled, but right away, they all shifted their arguments to explain why this statement was true. Some claimed there were more people on the highways during the summer months because of vacations and whatnot. Others blamed road construction projects. A couple of others pointed out that people might tend to drive slower and more carefully during the winter, and not display that same level of caution during the summer.

Be a little honest, here. Despite the fact that you probably guessed from the title of this post that I was doing something a little sneaky, were you mentally nodding at either (or both) of these statements? Were you thinking anything like “I can see that” or “That makes sense”?



Finally, someone in the class asked me which of the two statements was true. I shrugged and admitted that I had no idea. Maybe they're both false. The point I was trying to make is that any group of people – **even a very intelligent and rational group** – can take two statements that **basically contradict one another and find ways to justify each of those statements** without even realizing what they're doing.

As human beings, we're actually very trusting creatures, especially when we're dealing with someone we respect or someone we perceive as an authority figure. We hear a statement and our minds work to fill in the blanks – to convince ourselves of the validity of the statement – whether or not it's true. Like it or not, that's just how our brains tend to work.

This internal justification process often happens so fast, we don't even notice that we're *making up our own reasons* why something must be true. A lot of times, we even go so far as to say that the original statement is **obvious** based on these made-up reasons. Then, we treat these *facts* as assumptions when planning a new project without ever going through the process of legitimately verifying them. But when we can convince ourselves fairly easily that both one statement and another that completely contradicts it are true, it's time to take a step back.

When we're dealing with someone we respect... we hear a statement and... fill in the blanks. We don't even notice that we're making up our own reasons why something must be true!

So, getting back to the point of this entire post, **if I had to pick one simple thing that would greatly improve project management (and life, in general!), it would be to put more time and effort into the true verification of initial assumptions – even the small, seemingly obvious ones. Ask questions**, and then ask more questions. Perhaps even more importantly, don't forget to **document these questions and their answers** along with their associated **assumptions**.

Don't get me wrong. Depending on who you're dealing with, sometimes it can be more than a bit daunting to take a deep breath and ask for the data or the research to back up a statement that everybody else in the room takes for granted. After all, we don't want the rest of the team to think we're dumb because we can't see the obvious! But, therein lies the problem – **is the assumption really obvious or has everyone just convinced themselves that it is?**



Robert Kelly's One Simple Thing: Roles & Responsibilities

(The following article is part of our [One Simple Thing...to Improve Projects](#) series. It was contributed by **Robert Kelly**. Robert is a Managing Partner of [Kelly Project Solutions](#), Co-Founder of the [#PMChat Community](#) on Twitter, and author of his own blog [Kelly's Contemplation](#).

Robert is a certified PMP with over a decade of experience leading global projects at some of the largest financial services firms, the second largest PC manufacturer, and the largest provider of open source software. Robert can be found on Twitter at [@rkelly976](#)

As I thought about Michael's question "What's one simple thing that can improve projects and/or project management?" I thought of **communication, solid requirements, and value-added meetings**. Then I looked at what other folks were saying on the topic.... [Andrew Budkiewicz](#) mentioned a **project management champion** at the executive level, over at the [#PMChat on LinkedIn Group](#). Additionally, [Kelly Kazimer](#) and [Lindsay Chaffee](#) both provided some excellent posts on [Time Valuation](#) & [Change Control](#), respectively. After reviewing some of their insights and thinking more about some of the biggest headaches I have had to overcome, **I finally settled on Roles & Responsibilities**. One thing is difficult!

Even with the economy forcing people to wear multiple hats, you would assume that the various functions would understand what they are responsible for....IT owns systems dev, legal owns Terms and Conditions, Marketing owns value prop and so on. Unfortunately, many Project Managers find themselves on the other end of blank stares and the sound of crickets when asking about who will own the various work streams.

Aside from the actual work being completed, many team members never truly understand what is expected of them from a communication, organization support, or collaborative perspective as a member of the project. It often seems as though they believe they are consultants or there as a courtesy.

Here are a few tips to help level-set the team and ensure they understand what is expected of them on the project.

- 1. Most people have heard of a [RACI/ARCI Chart](#)...now use them!** Seriously, you need to **document who is on the team and what their responsibilities are for the various deliverables**. As with most things, this may evolve and needs to be revisited, but it has to be done early in the project. This will get some difficult conversations out of the way early and also

gain the commitment BEFORE the workload becomes a reality and everyone begins looking for ways to ‘wiggle’ out.

Responsibility/Accountability Matrix						
Phase ↓	Person →	Bill	Charmaine	Juan	Leticia	Mary
Determine Need & Feasibility		A	S	P	P	P
Create Project Plan		A	S,I	I	I	I
Create Deliverables Specifications		A, P	S	R	P	P
Create Deliverables		A, R	S	P	P	P
Test & Implement		A	I	R	R	P
P = Participate A = Accountable R = Review I = Input Required S = Sign-off Req'd						

(Graphic “Responsibility/Accountability Matrix” shows a modified version of a RACI chart.)

2. In my experience, **your project will have a resource assigned to represent their respective function** with regards to approvals, capabilities, work effort, etc. **It is crucial that they understand their role in the communication plan for the project.** You never want agreement from Procurement in your project meeting and then walk into an Executive update and the VP of Global Procurement hearing the change request for the first time. You need to ensure that the functional resources are each aware that part of their role and responsibilities as a member of the team is **to regularly communicate** with their respective managers and colleagues **about the status** of the project. I get that you should have various project communications in-place, you should be networking, etc., but these folks have the relationships and are able to discuss concerns/politics more openly within their own team. Their **continued bi-directional communication between their function and the project team will help socialize the effort, gain adoption, and secure executive support.**

3. As the PM responsible for the overall success of the initiative, you will often walk the tight rope of doing the work yourself (where you can) or letting poor performers flop. *I know, everyone reading this is the perfect motivator and never has team members that don't pull their weight...I am talking to the few that share this experience with me.* **It is very important that you are clear in making sure that your team members understand they must attend meetings (tell them when...1 time per week at X:00 am), remain engaged**

throughout the initiative, provide accurate estimates and updates, and so on. This falls into the project logistics and basic blocking and tackling, so you would think it is common sense....trust me it is not. **If they own a work stream and require a design session, then they own coordinating that session. You can be an optional attendee but are not responsible for driving every work stream.**



Two of the most frustrating aspects of leading projects are hearing “That’s not my job” or “Oh, I didn’t know I was supposed to run with that”. **If you can clearly communicate roles and responsibilities to your teammates and gain their sign-off early in the project, then you will head-off a number of issues right out of the gate.** A strong start is absolutely crucial to the success of any project. Gaining momentum, trust, and establishing yourself as a strong leader will position you to do that.



Lindsay Scott's One Simple Thing: Emphasize "Management" in PM

(The following article is part of our [One Simple Thing...to Improve Projects](#) series. It was contributed by [Lindsay Scott](#). Lindsay is a Director of [Arras People](#), the UK's project management recruitment specialists.

Lindsay started the company with a colleague 10 years ago. Prior to that she worked within PMO for Hewlett-Packard in the UK. Lindsay also blogs at [How to Manage a](#)

[Camel](#) on project management and recruitment issues. You can also follow [Lindsay on Twitter @projectmgmt](#).)

[NOTE: Lindsay's organization is now conducting their [Arras People Annual PPM Census](#). So stand up and be counted by completing their [brief online survey](#).]

“What is one simple thing that can improve projects and/or project management?”

Put the emphasis on management back into project management.

In simple terms projects are all about people and if we want to achieve our goals, we need great managers, managers of people.

‘Management’ and ‘manager’ are big words that are often overlooked when thinking about project management. So often we concentrate on the project. Yet in simple terms projects are all about people and if we want to achieve our goals, we need great managers, managers of people.

Is it a simple thing to emphasize the management in PM? I think so -- especially if it is considered during the hiring process when organizations are looking for new project managers.

When organizations set out to look for new project manager's their job specification will include role and responsibilities, success criteria, essential and desirable skills, etc. However if we take a closer look at the job specification there will generally be an emphasis on project management techniques, methods, tools and qualifications. **When it comes to the managerial competencies like leadership, team management, communication and conflict management, these are generally tucked away somewhere near the bottom of the specification.**

The behavioural skills and characteristics that are required to be an excellent manager within this organization are often relegated to a bullet point or two! Is this because defining behavioural skills is hard? Or is it because we have got sucked into the project mechanics which are much



easier to list? **Assessing these skills in an interview is harder still** and that is why I believe so many organizations steer away from really focusing on them in any great detail.

Back in 2010, in [Arras People's Benchmark Report*](#), **1500 project management practitioners were polled on project management competencies**. We wanted to find out which competencies were the most important to a project management practitioner. For a project manager, **the order of importance (most important first) in competencies were:**

- planning and organising;
- communication skills;
- relationship management;
- adaptability;
- leadership;
- the technical skills of project management.

The most important competencies from the project manager's view are all the basic managerial skills you would expect to see in any good manager. In

the [2003 book *The New Manager's Handbook*](#) seven skill areas were identified to perform the role of manager effectively. These were: communication, interpersonal skills, presentation skills, developing other people, change management, strategic management and time management. These are all important core skills that should form a firm foundation for the project manager.



So reconsider the hiring organization that is just about to select and interview candidates for a project management post: Are they putting the cart before the horse? **Is the assumption all too readily made that a practitioner who can demonstrate “the technical skills of project management” will by default have the necessary “management skills”?**

My proposal is that we get back to basics. Hiring companies first need to look closer at their organizational culture and define better what kind of manager they need. **"Cultural fit" is a term that is often bandied about** to ensure organizations get the right people working for them. But in reality **what does this really mean?** What style of management works well in the organization? **We need to benchmark our great managers** to see what characteristics and skills they actually possess. What kind of teams do we have? How do these people like to be managed? What do our customers like about the people we have working for us?

The selection and interviewing process should be turned right on its head! It should focus on the core competencies of management before looking at the project-specific experience. We select interview questions that really focus on leadership, team

management and relationships etc. We devise scenarios and tests that are aimed at really understanding the candidate's core management skills first and their project management skills a close second. We take seriously any profiling tools that are out there that can give us a greater insight into personality, leadership style, team fit etc.

We place a greater importance on the core management skills that are displayed by the candidate and are evident throughout the recruitment process. **Once we are satisfied that we have a great manager we can then move on and see if they're also a great *project* manager.**

*2010 Arras People Benchmark Report -

http://www.arraspeople.co.uk/assets/ckeditor/ckfinder/userfiles/files/BenchmarkReport/ArrasPeople_PMBR_2010-4PRINT.pdf

HELP WANTED WITH ANNUAL PM CENSUS!

Stand up and be counted! And help Lindsay's organization by participating in the [Arras People Annual PPM Census 2011](#).



Go to: http://survey.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_1B2NgaisSqiGgn2

Reader Comments About Lindsay Scott's One Simple Thing: Emphasize "Management" in PM

From: *Deanne Earle*, unlikebefore.com [*on using a "person specification"*]

Lindsay: Excellent post on an excellent topic. "Hiring companies first need to look closer at their organizational culture and define better what kind of manager they need" resonated loudly. In a previous life I made a point of creating a 'person specification' as

Once we are satisfied that we have a great manager we can then move on and see if they're also a great *project* manager.

well as a 'position specification' when hiring. The basis for this was I knew I'd get gazillions of applicants with the

‘right’ technical skills but few applicants with the ‘right’ cultural fit for the team and the organisation. These ‘person specs’ helped our HR people better position my needs and in turn meant the agencies could help candidates assess their fit before being put forward. It also streamlined the interview process by signaling ‘you’re here because you have the technical skill, now let’s see how we fit each other as people.’ It means you have to know the characteristics and style that works but the ROI on the effort of finding out is huge and goes a long way to eliminating the square peg in round hole syndrome. - Deanne

From: **Sarah**, clarizen.com/ProjectManagementSoftware.aspx [on “*people & leadership skills*”]

I do agree that being a manager is all about great people skills and leadership skills. The problem is that it is hard to recognize these skills in a job interview, so you only know who to hire if they have previous experience and good references. This makes it really hard for new people to break into the job scene. Let’s not forget that many of these skills can be learned, and using project management software to organize and communicate with your team can really enhance your management skills.

From: **Michael Greer**, <http://michaelgreer.biz>

Good point, Sarah! I know I am always more confident about making assignments and give clearer instructions when I have a “high resolution” plan backing me up. And PM software helps create such a plan. Thanks for sharing your thoughts.

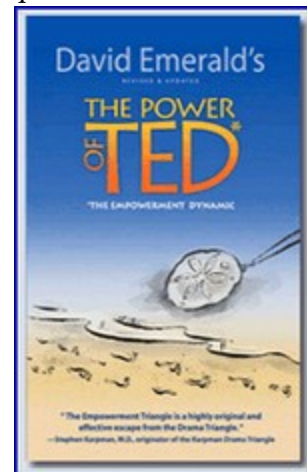


David Emerald's One Simple Thing: Adopt a Creator Orientation

(The following article is part of our [One Simple Thing...to Improve Projects](#) series. It was contributed by [David Emerald, the creator of TED -- The Empowerment Dynamic](#). David is the author of [The Power of TED*](#) book, an executive [coach, and uplifting keynote speaker](#) who lives in the Pacific Northwest with his wife and business partner, Donna.

In a nutshell, TED provides a framework for building better, more empowered relationships. The [Power of TED materials](#), as well as [David's workshops](#), are both inspirational and practical! TED enlightens and encourages those who practice it to reach new levels of collaboration.)

[A personal note: "I've found that TED provides a unique framework to view and improve both my business and personal relationships. I was so excited to share TED's potential for project teams that I created the blog post/podcast [Shift from Drama to Empowerment](#). Thanks, David, for the wisdom & the inspiration!" -- Mike Greer]



My number one “simple thing” is to adopt a Creator Orientation.

Projects are put in place to create outcomes. However, in the process, problems are inevitably going to arise. When they do, they can easily pull us – individually and as a team – into what I call the Victim Orientation. In this mindset, which is often the “default” in organizations, we are problem-focused; anxiety-based and reactive.

By adopting a Creator Orientation, we stay focused on the outcome(s) we are creating; are passion-motivated; and take the baby steps necessary to accomplish the project.

Baby steps can include solving problems. However, rather than merely reacting to the “problem du jour,” we can identify, prioritize, and get to the root cause of those challenges that must be overcome to create the outcomes we envision.

To **learn more** about the **Creator Orientation**, check out the [TED Tools](#) section of the [TED website](#).

Overall Comments from Readers

[The responses below were posted as Comments to my original blog post, One Simple Thing... as described above.]

From: **Ivan Rivera, PMP**, ivanrivera-pmp.com [*on “good communication”*]

I think it is not easy to find a single thing (and “simple,” also) that can help improve project management. If I have to choose, I may not go for a tool, not a best practice, but by a concept of “good communication.” And then the issue is not simple any more. Because we have to decide what is “good communication?”

The project manager will find the answer using some questions:

- What should be reported?
- To whom, how often?

The answers to these questions can be arranged in a communications matrix, without losing sight that are not static responses, that everything could change throughout the project. The Project Manager must be assured throughout the project to get a constant flow of information between all stakeholders, filtering or translating what is necessary, respecting the frequency agreed with each other and making adjustments each time is necessary.

I think a good communication [strategy] is something that can help improve project management. But I insist this is not necessarily a “simple” matter.

From: **Michael Greer**, <http://michaelgreer.biz>

Thanks, Ivan! You’ve made some great points here. I like the idea of creating a communications matrix. This would make it easier to quickly scan and identify communication requirements, status, etc. And anything that helps a project manager work more quickly without losing effectiveness is really valuable.

From: **Bob Griffiths**, bobgriffiths.com [*on asking “What is and is not working?”*]

One simple idea which is somehow more difficult to put into practice is the idea of asking at regular intervals:

- What is working?
- What is not working?

The tricky bit is to give yourself the space to step back from the busyness of doing and reflect for a moment on the ‘how’ you are doing it. It is very connected to the idea of

mindfulness. Once you take the time to reflect on what is working or not you create the space to change things.

Great question Michael

From: **Michael Greer**, <http://michaelgreer.biz>

Wow! What a great simple insight! Mindfulness as a platform for practical problem-solving! I love it. Thanks for this comment, Bob.

(Readers: Check out Bob's website for lots of good insights for teams:
<http://www.bobgriffiths.com/>)

From **Tom Fitzsimmons** via **Michael Greer**, <http://michaelgreer.biz> [*on "improving the small tasks"*]

The following thoughts were shared by a high-school buddy of mine, **Tom Fitzsimmons**, via Facebook:

“Concentrate on improving all the small tasks; they in turn will improve the larger task.

When I was in process improvements, the first thing I always checked out was the job [task] descriptions and what was being done and what wasn't being done. What I found was the small, boring tasks were either being ignored and not done or they were being done just to be done with no care given to them. When you added them all up they were having an adverse effect on the whole effort of trying to improve the process.

I always started where I wanted to finish and worked backwards to see what the root cause was and how these small tasks either had an effect or were not needed at all. What I found in most cases was that these small tasks almost at all times had a big effect on the outcome — to make the improvement these tasks had to be done. Some could be eliminated but the majority had to be done.”

From: **Margie Shoop** hartinc.com [*on "yourself" as the best tool*]

The best tool is yourself. You need to be confident, communicate, ask questions, follow up and have no fear.

Our company talks about the tools and the process we need in place. I assist in those efforts. Yet when it comes to making a team to achieve the results – we look at the person and their integrity, capabilities and passion to manage this project well. Anyone can use an ink pen – but not everyone can write a great novel. Tools assist the person who can truly make the project a success.

<http://www.linkedin.com/in/margieshoop>

From: **Michael Greer**, <http://michaelgreer.biz>

Thanks, Margie! You're absolutely right, it's the people who make things happen!

From: **Susanne Madsen**, susannemadsen.com [on "*Keep things simple.*" & "*Focus on people.*"]

Hi Michael,

Wow! That's a challenging question. I can think of a number of things, of course, for instance the 15 I have highlighted in this article, "15 Principles of Project Management Success" <http://bit.ly/jwABWz> but one single thing..?

I would be inclined to say "Keep things simple" as the one biggest tip – but a more substantial tip may be to "Focus on People".

Acquire the most driven, experienced and best qualified people for your team and focus on making them thrive.

Value them, protect them from internal politics and give them the training, tools and working conditions they need to apply their talents.

Find out what motivates each individual and find a way to tap into their hidden potential.

Cross train staff, facilitate knowledge sharing and have succession planning in place. Ring fence resources where possible so that you do not have to share them with other projects.

Nurture the team and make sure that working on the project is a worthwhile experience.

Also have a look at my piece on managing and motivating the team <http://bit.ly/hbpbN5>

Kind regards,
Susanne

[@SusanneMadsen](https://twitter.com/SusanneMadsen) [on Twitter]

From: **Michael Greer**, <http://michaelgreer.biz>

Thanks so much, Susanne, for the links to your tools and for your thoughts on the importance of focusing on people. I strongly agree that it's all about the people! All our lovely life cycle diagrams, PM artifacts, charts, and plans can't generate deliverables or complete your project. The creation of deliverables results from all those little choices

made by the people on your team. Without their engagement... their good will... their effectiveness... we simply have no project outcomes! The points you make above shine a light on how project managers can achieve all these in their teams.

A special note to some of you a-social techies about this “people stuff.” I know you guys well. I’ve had you in my classes for decades. And I know that you’d rather be left alone to generate PM artifacts instead of dealing with all this messy people stuff. But remember this: If you want a team that takes action on your behalf instead of ignoring your project for “other priorities,” you’re going to need to master the strategies that Suzanne discusses in her Comment and in her links. There’s no getting around it.

Thanks again, Suzanne for this thought-provoking response. I urge our readers go deeper by checking out your links. (Bonus! These documents include study questions! How cool is that?)

“Team Motivation” — <http://bit.ly/hbpbN5>

“15 Principles of Project Management Success” <http://bit.ly/jwABWz>

From: **Margie Shoop** hartinc.com [*on you, project manager, as the best tool*]

The best tool is yourself. You need to be confident, communicate, ask questions, follow up and have no fear.

Our company talks about the tools and the process we need in place. I assist in those efforts. Yet when it comes to making a team to achieve the results – we look at the person and their integrity, capabilities and passion to manage this project well. Anyone can use an ink pen – but not everyone can write a great novel. Tools assist the person who can truly make the project a success.

<http://www.linkedin.com/in/margieshoop>

From: **Michael Greer**, <http://michaelgreer.biz>

Thanks, Margie! You’re absolutely right, it’s the people who make things happen!

From: **Raechel**, talkingwork.com [*on her followers’ responses... and “lose the ego”*]

I posed your question to some of our PM contacts on Twitter/Facebook and here are some of the responses that I got:

- “Honesty.”
- “Cutting out the boss that has no idea what he/she talks about and sets up ridiculous timeframes.”
- “Stepping away from the office and spending time with the team contributing to the project”
- “Cash flow linked to successful transition in defined ‘gates’ in the contract.”

I hope those answers can be of some use to you. As for me, the one thing that continues to come to mind when I consider your question is to “lose the ego.” Unfortunately, I don’t think that’s a very “simple” thing, or more people would do it! But I firmly believe that more problems would be solved, communication would improve, and teams would function more harmoniously in environments of mutual respect and trust if all parties involved in projects could grasp that one small concept.

From: **Michael Greer**, <http://michaelgreer.biz>

Thanks so much, Raechel! These are really insightful.
[Readers: Visit Raechel's website here: <http://talkingwork.com/>]

From: **Project Management Tools That Work (Bruce)** - PMToolsThatWork.com [*on “getting the schedule right”*]

My regular refrain is “get the schedule right.” This is something that is much more doable than most folks believe.

- Get the Project Management Schedule Right! — <http://pmtoolsthatwork.com/get-schedule-right/>
- How To Avoid Optional Chaos In Your Project — <http://pmtoolsthatwork.com/how-to-avoid-optional-chaos-in-your-project/>

I’ve more, but I don’t want to set off the spam filter!

Bruce

From: **Michael Greer**, <http://michaelgreer.biz>

Thanks, Bruce! Your article “Get the PM Schedule Right” is quite comprehensive. Then it’s up to the project manager to “sell” senior management on accepting that carefully-planned schedule. However, if planners do all the homework you suggest in your article, that discussion with senior management would be much more effective (supported by evidence, history, etc.). Great insights!

From: **Sara**, paperlantern.com [*on the agile “retrospective”*]

I recently worked on and got educated in Agile precepts. One of my favorite Agile techniques or practices was the Retrospective. After every “sprint” or project benchmark was completed, we’d have a meeting where the agenda was basically:

1. Celebrate the accomplishment

2. Run a demo or otherwise do our best to exhibit the functioning success of the output of the latest part of the project
3. Talk about what made the “sprint” go well (both from a process and a product perspective)
4. Talk about what we’d like to improve about future sprints (mostly from a process perspective, but product perspective can be incorporated here too.)

The team lead or an assigned team member should take notes and distribute minutes within a week after the meeting. The team lead or an assigned team member is responsible for incorporating action items generated from #4, into the agenda for the next meeting, so that the team can collectively improve their performance through self-identified and agreed-upon activities.

If you’re having problems with negativity on your team, or a culture of blame, or other team-damaging dynamics, the Retrospective agenda can be finagled to try to account for them, there are lots of great ideas out there if you search “Agile Retrospectives” on google. I feel that however you do your Retrospective, it should at least get to the 4 agenda items and follow up outlined above, but like almost everything in Agile, you can do more if you need to!

Even if you’re not “Agile,” the simple practice of a Retrospective forces the team lead to define and communicate project benchmarks, to celebrate team accomplishments, and to seek and incorporate feedback from team members. It is empowering for the whole team and leads to lots of constructive communications and responsibility-sharing.

So I vote for Retrospectives as my “One Simple Thing”. (“Product Backlogs” are a close second, but they are less simple than Retrospectives).

From: *Michael Greer*, <http://michaelgreer.biz>

Great comment, Sara! Thanks for your thoughtful response. (Learn more about Sara at <http://www.paperlantern.com>)

Responses from LinkedIn's PMChat Group

I belong to the [“PMChat” group on LinkedIn](#). This group is an offshoot of the regular [Friday #PMChat](#) discussion on Twitter. *(For background info about this group & how Twitter chats work, see my blog post: [#PMChat: Weekly Live PM Chat on Twitter](#))*

In a discussion titled “One Simple Thing to Improve Projects or PM” I asked my fellow LinkedIn PMChat group members this question:

“I've been gathering input from all over the place in search of the answer to this question: ‘What’s one simple thing that can improve projects and/or project management?’ -- Sure, you might know 50 things... but what happens when you engage your great big brain and your years of wisdom/experience to reduce that list of 50 to the ONE SIMPLE THING? Looking forward to your insights!”

Here are the responses to date:

[Andy Budkiewicz, MSP, PMP, PRINCE2](#) wrote: “A project management **champion** at the **executive level**.”

[Paola Realpozo](#) wrote: “To me one word: **Integrity**.”

Responses from Focus (Focus.com)

Focus ([Focus.com](#)) is “... a network of thousands of leading business and technology experts who are thought leaders, veteran practitioners and upstart innovators in hundreds of different topics and markets... Whether it's Q&A, Research or Events, you can personalize all of the expertise on Focus by following specific topics and Experts. Focus is also easy to use and freely available to anyone who wants help making better business decisions.”

As one of the Focus Experts, I posted this question: “What's one simple thing that can improve projects and/or project management?” Below are the answers that have been posted to date. These are presented in the date order that they appeared on the Focus website. *(Note that I've added the bold. Note also that you can click on respondents' names to go to their Focus profiles and learn more about them.)*

[Craig Palz](#): “I find that the best strategy is to simply **put trust in your staff**. Ensure that you assign projects to people that are truly capable of succeeding in the task, then allow them to succeed. Sure, mistakes will inevitably occur. Point them out to the person

and then have them fix it. Don't rush to the rescue all the time. By demonstrating trust in your staff they will gain confidence in their decisions and learn from their mistakes. Good decision making does not come naturally. If people are not given the opportunity to think things through themselves and discover the best answer, they will defer the decisions to their superiors. Be there to offer guidance if needed, and offer positive feedback.”

[Alan Munroe](#): “the removal of egos”

[Roger Silverman](#): “Hi Michael... This is an excellent question!

Having rescued several disaster projects, I've found the single most common root cause is not managing the expectations of the sponsor, stakeholders and/or receiver of the project. This leads to very expensive and time consuming re-work, but worst of all it adds more stress, loss of morale/motivation and slows down productivity in the project team as well as loss of trust by the stakeholders. And things tend to just continue downhill from there.

So my one thing to improve projects and projects management is to **get a common understanding of EXACTLY what the project closing criteria are at the very beginning of the project**. I don't know if there is a word for it, Scope Definition and Scope Management are close but they don't define the actual project closing criteria. As soon as I take on a project the very FIRST thing I do is get an agreement with the project stakeholders, sponsor and/or receiver on the acceptance criteria for closing the project. This should be as detailed as possible, e.g. use cases, test cases, how many and what type of faults are acceptable and can be fixed at a later date or 2nd phase, etc. Once this has been defined and agreed, I assemble the team and we work backwards from the closing criteria to come up with the time plan, resource plan, risk management/risk assessment, cost estimations, roles and responsibilities, responsibility matrix etc. The project goal is then to meet the closing criteria, nothing more, nothing less.

All through the project, it's important to have regular meetings with the stakeholders or Steering Committee and set up the report to remind everyone of what was agreed upon in addition to time, scope, cost, and risk status. The idea here is that **throughout the entire project lifecycle, there should be absolutely NO doubts as to what the project is going to deliver**, when it will deliver and at what cost. ... Hope this made sense.”

[Jon Singleton](#): “Cloud software ;-)”

[Barry Schaeffer](#): “While there are a plethora of tools and techniques aimed at project management (and at the bottom lines of the firms selling and supporting those tools), I think a good case can be made for maximizing the chances of project success through the kind of **open-minded pre-technology analysis that clearly identifies and describes what is really being attempted and in what environment the attempt is being made**.

Most projects do an inadequate job of figuring out just what is in the mix of requirements, resources, constraints, impacts and risks that must be addressed as the need becomes plan becomes project becomes solution. Indeed, the rush to technological considerations is at times so frenzied that the project ends up failing to even address the real challenges (you know... if your most favorite tool is a hammer, everything tends to look like a nail to you.)

In today's world, with the incredible evolution of technology, the real questions for most major projects are increasingly organizational, human, procedural, cost and timing-related. Understanding all of this takes time and the involvement of every impacted group within and outside the organization. A true solution cannot be based on a few weeks of interviews by the IT group nor can it be force-fitted into protocols like six-sigma or lean (which are very powerful but aimed at a very narrow slice of change.) Indeed, Peter Checkland's obscure Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) may come closer to being appropriate in many cases.

Interestingly, the same situation obtained in the early days of computing and IT (mid-60s for me when it was called "data processing") when the challenges were just as great but the technology was so limited (IBM's top business mainframe, the 7074 had a 3/4 mhz processor and 100K character-limit memory) that comprehensive and searching analysis and design had to be done to make up for what we all knew technology could not do.... You might say we have come full circle, but in many cases haven't quite realized it yet."

David Goodwin: “**Attention to detail.** Given the demands on everyone's time, simple to understand, but often difficult to execute.”

fulvio ritter: “A **good communication plan** that cover:

- WBS
- Schedule
- Metrics of quality
- Status Report

the execution of this plan is 90% of the project manager time. A good leadership with the team. The right tool for the project and resource management needs.”

Art van Bodegraven: “One thing, but it's not simple, not quick, and not inexpensive is to **invest in building alignment, trust, and whole-brained interaction** in the team(s) responsible for the project's execution and accountable for its outcome(s).”

Bill Wood: “**R - A - C - I and a project plan** (I'm still SHOCKED at how many PMs avoid using real project plans!). So that is 2 items.

Responsible, Accountable (or approval), Consulted, and Informed.

Build a RACI chart, INCLUDING for the project manager themselves!

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Having a RACI chart creates the underlying requirement for all of the deliverables to be defined and assigned. For a project plan to be in place and managed, etc. Basically it

creates an environment where a PM and the project team are both responsible with clear lines of accountability and delivery.

What I have seen over the years is this, when you first start down this path, as with all new things, it will be inadequate. But using the RACI chart and having a project plan will quickly evolve into a useful and meaningful process exercise.

Some PMs who are not that skilled will avoid a project plan altogether and others will build an overly detailed monstrosity with thousands of lines that no one could ever effectively manage. That overly complex plan makes a great "hedge" to hide behind, or from personality or lack of experience they feel the need to micromanage everything. The RACI chart together with a project plan (no matter how bad) quickly points out an unmanageable project plan and creates the need to adjust the plan. It also creates more direct involvement and accountability for all of the parties, across all deliverables and project activities.

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For more insight on the whole PM thing I've experienced on complex projects see:

SAP Project Manager – SAP Program Manager, Lessons from the Trenches

<http://www.r3now.com/sap-project-manager-sap-program-manager-lessons-from-the...>

Effective Results from SAP Project Managers – SAP Program Managers

<http://www.r3now.com/effective-results-from-sap-project-managers-sap-program-...> “

Nipun Jethi: “If I had to pick one thing,... a **clear articulation from the outset to the team on how their work will impact the business and the strategy** (degree of definition variable) for the team to fulfill that potential.... Sure, managing the blocking and tackling is important but if your players' heads are not in the game and the game-plan is not well understood, you can kiss that win goodbye. (Sorry, I'm clearly reveling in the heart of football season.)”

Richard Louis: (In reply to the preceding) “Excellent analogy, and spot on.”

John McCoy: “In a word: **LEADERSHIP...** The problem is so systemic, it’s embedded in the name “project management.” Project management as a practice is suffering from a lack of solid leadership. Can you imagine if you ran a company with managers alone and no leadership? How successful would that company be? This is exactly what we’ve done with project management. Project management training is all about the logistical and mechanical aspects of management, but when a project team assembles they also need strong and effective leadership. They need someone **to take ownership, make key decisions, and set direction.**”

Akhil Gupta: “MAI- Measurement, Analysis & Improvement”

Lynn Maria Thompson: “One thing, answered as an entrepreneur who was stuck in corporate jobs for the first half of her career, is for **all team members to keep their eyes on the goal.** Projects, especially those that involve a large team, can easily get sidetracked by meetings, research, consensus-building, and reporting. A fair portion of that can amount to busy-work that greatly prolong the process. If team members keep asking themselves along the way, "How does what I'm doing contribute to achieving the

goal of this project?" that goal can be accomplished much more quickly and efficiently. Perhaps a poster with the project's goal should be placed at the front of the room at every meeting, with small versions made for each team member's work area. However you need to keep that end goal in mind, do it...just don't turn that into another side-tracking project!"

VIRGILIO ANTONIO. CONDE: “For me only one simple and foremost: **Increasing Knowledge and skill** of the Project Team Member including the Project Manager.”

Fadi ABI-AAD: “Always make sure the project is and remains **aligned with the Enterprise (or Customer) Goals and Strategies.**”

alan bishop: “**Engage** at all levels, overcome inertia.”

Baxter Denney: “Many good tips here already, mine is **make sure folks are focused on the next real, tangible action they need to take** on any given task. If the next real thing they need to do is not clear, it delays progress.”

Debra Pekin: “Be **courageous** enough to **tell senior leaders** the truth about their responsibility to lead and promote the successful outcome, be **diligent** enough to continuously **remind people** that you can't ignore the end user and expect to be successful, be **tenacious** enough to **call out the real risks** and don't let the group shuffle problems forward in a collusion of 'we'll fix it later'.”

Mike Cuppett: “Hire a **proven leader** with experience in several types of businesses and many technologies.”

Glen Marshall: “While this may sound heartless in today's economy, **quickly firing under-achievers** will boost morale and do wonders for team productivity.”

VIRGILIO ANTONIO. CONDE: “The answer to your questions is simple the Project Management **optimize resources used expressed in low cost and time**. But only the good quality of the Project Team and Project Manager optimize the Project Management Process. This quality is expressed in Agile Knowledge and Management Capabilities and Skills.”

Ed Cochran: “It all comes down to **Accountability**. **What needs to be done? Who is responsible** for doing it? **When** does it need to be accomplished? **How will we monitor** whether it does in fact get done on schedule?... There are many tools available to do this (with varied levels of sophistication). And other issues come into play involving budgets, resource allocations, etc. But they are all meaningless unless someone specifically needs to be accountable for each key task.”

Conclusion

So... What's that "One Simple Thing..." that could improve your projects and PM? Given the wide range of heart-felt answers so generously shared by our fellow PM warriors, I've decided that the ideal "**One Simple Thing...**" is **context sensitive**. That is, it **depends** on what's going on in your project, *right here... right now*.

However, your ability to perceive the accurate or "real" nature of things on your project, here and now, assumes you have a certain amount of mental clarity. As **Bob Griffiths**, (bobgriffiths.com) reminded us above: "The tricky bit is to give yourself the space to step back from the busyness of doing and reflect for a moment on the 'how' you are doing it. It is very connected to the idea of **mindfulness**. Once you take the time to reflect on what is working or not you create the space to change things."

Building on Bob's suggestion, I'd add that **acceptance of what is** becomes essential to the quality of the project manager's decisions. It's one thing to see what's happening (i.e., to see what's working or not working), but it can be quite another to fully accept it. Yet it is only after you accept what is – and not waste time or effort thrashing around fighting reality – that an effective PM approach can be chosen. In fact, failure to accept what is not only wastes time and energy, it can make everyone on your project team miserable! As Eckhart Tolle reminds us: "... **if you are not in a state of either acceptance, enjoyment, or enthusiasm, look closely and you will find that you are creating suffering for yourself and others.**" (For more on this topic, see my blog post "[Are You Causing Suffering for Your Project Team?](#)")

In sum, after listening to all the wise voices who spoke so eloquently above, **I'd operationalize the process of applying their "One Simple Things" as follows:**

1. **Step back** from all the PM **doing** (what Bob call's "busyness") and reflect on what's working and what's not working.
2. **Accept** things as they are. (That is, don't waste time or energy agonizing or denying the past.)
3. **Review** the ideas above and ask, "Giving what's going on in my project, which of these can I apply that will make things better, right here... right now?"
4. **Take action** to apply that "one simple thing" and observe the results.
(Repeat as needed.)

(Again... My heartfelt "Thanks!" to all those who were kind enough to create and share their thoughtful responses to this challenge! I am confident that there will be at least a few project managers or project team members whose work will proceed just a little more smoothly because you shared your insights. Well done!)



For More Info & Freebies

Check out these additional PM resources. Most of them are free!

[The Project Management Minimalist Collection](#) – Everything you need to apply “just enough” PM to rock your projects!

[The PM Minimalist Quick Start Guide](#) – a FREE 38-page document with PM tools designed to help you plan and manage your first project using *the PM*

Minimalist approach. (Available in Kindle, NOOK, or PDF format.)

[Free Articles, Tools, & Media from Michael Greer’s PM Resources Website](#) --

Organized into **five collections**.

- [PM Vision & Values](#)
- [PM Tools & Procedures](#)
- [PM Inspiration, Motivation, & Team Building](#)
- [PM Training & Career Development](#)
- [Managing Instructional Development \(ID\) Projects](#)

Who’s Michael Greer, Anyway?

You’ll find my full biographical info, including a brief video tour of my website, here:

[Overview & Biography](#)