Selling Project Management
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'Our customers really love us, so they don't care if their projects are late and don't work.'

Is this what you think? Is this what your project 'customers' are really saying?

How about this?
'We figure it's more profitable to have 50% overruns than to spend 15% on project management to prevent them.'

Do you ever get to hear that one?

Now I am not sure what sort of project world that you exist in but in my world, the commercial software world, there is often a challenge in getting customers of our products to accept the need to invest in project management from us as the product and services supplier.

Here are some ideas on how to address some of the common 'pushbacks' that you might receive in this situation:

'I'm just buying the software and support from you; I don't have a project…'
- Your response – By investing in our technology you are internally committed to deploying a solution and as such you need to consider the management of your investment in terms of scope, deadlines and budget

'This is just a Pilot project …'
- Your response – Pilot projects are a real showcase for the potential of performance management and will form the platform for future deployments. Therefore a structured project approach is imperative in maximising this opportunity for your project team and your sponsor.

'I'm very relaxed about project deadlines and budget …'
- Your response - Someone in your organisation must be serious about this project and the associated (significant) investment. Therefore the expected return on investment should be managed to deliver that ROI in a reasonable timeframe. This very statement is a project risk.

'I have my own project manager and your project manager would not understand my business or project team anyway…'
- Your response – Project Management requires a significant amount of domain expertise I know. Our project managers are there to complement the skills and experience of your existing project manager. Even if we are part of a delivery team using SI's, Partners and your resources we should have a project manager in place for effective planning and communication.

'I can just use the support organisation for any issues I encounter…'
- Your response – Yes you can, but this is a very ineffective way to deliver a project, there will be no coordination of resource requirements, promised timelines and scope can never be delivered against and your ROI will reduce as your own internal resources assimilate a new set of products.

And, perhaps the most common one?

'Your project management is too expensive…'

- Your response - What is the cost of failure for your project? What, therefore, is the value of de-risking that project by investing a relatively small number of days of project management?

I believe that a lot of the above also applies to 'selling' project management internally in organisations. Here are a few more perhaps typical comments that you might have come across:

'Organising to manage projects isn't compatible with our culture, and the last thing we need around this place is change'

'We aren't smart enough to implement project management without stifling creativity and offending our technical geniuses'

'We might have to understand our customers' requirements and document a lot of stuff, and that is such a bother'

'Project management requires integrity and courage, so they would have to pay me extra'

'Our bosses won't provide the support needed for project management; they want us to get better results through magic'

'We'd have to apply project management blindly to all projects regardless of size and complexity, and that would be stupid'

Have you heard any of these? How have you managed to address them and 'sell' the value of project management?

People, if you look at the wisdom of sales methodology, generally 'buy' something for a number of reasons. Two of these are:

Fear

They are afraid that the consequences of not buying will be significant or they already have an issue that is causing them problems, or embarrassment, or concern. Sadly – and I have done this myself – when selling project management it is all too easy to reach for the latest project success report and declare that most projects fail and not having a project manager in place is a major contributor to this failure. This is a negative and does not do much for project management (or the project manager). The tactic is to scare people in to accepting project management and, whilst it can work, it will be a challenging task to ever prove the value of this forced decision.

Gain

Alternatively people 'buy' something because they believe that they can gain something as a result, image enhancement, acceptance, better performance, reduced risk to them personally etc. This is a far more positive approach and one that benefits project management and, if used successfully, brings project management to the point of a partnership with the buyer.

There is a lot to be done in the selling of project management but to be clear, **'Our customers really want to love us, but they do care if their projects are late and don't work.'**

About the Author

Peter Tailor is a dynamic and commercially astute professional who has achieved notable success in Project Management.

His background is in project management across three major business areas over the last 26 years, MRP/ERP systems with various software houses and culminating in his current role with Infor, Business Intelligence (BI) with Cognos, and product lifecycle management (PLM) with Siemens.

He has spent the last 7 years leading PMOs and developing project managers and is now focusing on project based services development with Infor. He is also an accomplished communicator and leader and is a professional speaker as well as the author of '*The Lazy Project Manager'* (Infinite Ideas) and *'Leading Successful PMOs'* (Gower) and *'The Lazy Winner'* (Gower).

More information can be found at www.thelazyprojectmanager.com – and through his free podcasts in iTunes.