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The Hidden Costs and Dangers of the Shortcut

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We live in a world where we are often pressured to take shortcuts to save time and cut costs as much as possible. However, if you're not a skilled and experienced project manager, the wrong shortcut could end up costing you a lot more. Here's an anecdote to think about:

Let's say you are running a project, and the goal is to upgrade a road to a remote property. You solicit bids from several contractors and ask them to do it for the least cost possible, and you also stipulate you don't want to get any permits.

None of the contractors are willing to work under those conditions, so you get your own earth moving equipment and a friend with some experience to help you upgrade your road.

In the process, you fill in a spillway to a dam for a reservoir. You think this is no big deal because the fine you pay for that is far less than what it would've cost to hire a contractor to do the job properly.

Three years later in a heavy rainstorm, the dam breaks because the spillway has been compromised. Seven homes are washed away in the ensuing flood and 10 people die. Now, what was intended as a shortcut to save money ends up taking lives.

Is it so farfetched? How often is safety comprised every day because people are looking for the quick way out? Even more important as project managers, we have a responsibility to be the voice of reason that understands the hidden costs and dangers of the shortcut.

Let's look at how a PMP® could have prevented this:

- **Standards** - When someone gets a PMP®, they are showing they are willing to learn the global standards that are universally accepted as a standard set of processes, tools and techniques for doing projects - ALL projects. This means they are willing to learn the rules of the game. Rules are generally created for very good reasons – and as project managers who know how to follow them, PMP®s show their leadership because they have the ability to go the distance, learn the rules of the game and only adapt them when it is for the overall good of

a project.

- **Stakeholder Impact** – To become a PMP[®], a person has to learn about a variety of topics that influence the outcome of projects. Many factors that influence the outcome of a project have absolutely nothing to do with the goal of the project - as in the story above where the goal was to upgrade the road. In pursuit of their PMP[®] project managers learn to weigh all the stakeholder impacts on their projects and to ask the tough questions.
- **Communication** - PMP[®]s learn how important it is to communicate with everyone involved in a project and look beyond the typical aspects of satisfying the project sponsor to include all the factors. In the anecdote, the property owner was, in fact, the project manager and is now being charged with manslaughter because of the unintended consequences of his project.

Could someone without a PMP[®] have done just as good a job managing the road project? From my experience, having someone with a PMP[®] leading your projects reduces the risks of managing the project because they have a demonstrated ability to play by the rules. In a world enamored with people “just doing it” and “thinking outside the box,” we need folks who still know how to learn the rules, understand why they exist, and create a safe environment for all.

Editor's note: This article was distributed through Cheetah's The Know How Network, a monthly column written by Michelle LaBrosse, the founder and Chief Cheetah of Cheetah Learning. Distributed to hundreds of newsletters and media outlets around the world, the Know How Network brings the promise, purpose and passion of Project Management to people everywhere. Visit www.cheetahlearning.com to learn more about Cheetah PM, the fastest way to learn about Project Management and get your PMP.

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Michelle LaBrosse, PMP is the founder and Chief Cheetah of Cheetah Learning. An international expert on accelerated learning and Project Management, she has grown Cheetah Learning into the market leader for Project Management training and professional development. Cheetah Learning is a virtual company with 100 employees, contractors, and licensees worldwide. To date, more than 30,000 people have become “Cheetahs” using Cheetah Learning’s innovative Project Management and accelerated learning techniques. In 2006, The Project Management Institute, www.pmi.org, selected Michelle as one of the 25 Most Influential Women in Project Management in the World, and only one of two women selected from the training and education industry. Michelle is a graduate of the Harvard Business School’s Owner & President Management program for entrepreneurs, and is the author of *Cheetah Project Management* and *Cheetah Negotiations*. To contact Michelle, visit www.cheetahlearning.com.