

## PM TIPS & TECHNIQUES – NOVEMBER 2007

### Growing your Small Business with Project Management

by Michelle LaBrosse, PMP®

If you think Project Management is only for the big guys, think again. Project Management is a powerful business tool for businesses of any size. And as any small business person will tell you, effectiveness and efficiency is never about size. It's about working smart.

#### Improve Performance with Process

PM is the science of getting things done. The problem in most businesses is that there is no set process to get work done effectively and efficiently. As small business owners, we often make the mistake of thinking that when we're small, we don't need to develop processes. Not true! Even if you are an entrepreneur and a company of one person, you need to have a standard way of approaching projects. According to a February 2003 study by The Center for Business Practices (CBP)<sup>1</sup>, the largest PM challenge facing companies is implementing a consistent process. From lost time to inconsistency, not having a process means poor performance.



#### Where are the Projects in your Business?

Think about the projects in your business. A project doesn't necessarily have a huge budget associated with it. A project is any activity in your business that has a distinct deliverable and a clear beginning and end. We all have a lot of those kicking around both our office and our homes. So, now the question is: Who knows how to manage them? If you're an entrepreneur, do you have the PM skills you need to build your business? If you're managing people, do any of them have PM skills that can save you time and money and bring more profit to the bottom line?

The good news about PM methods is that they are easy to learn and can be applied with simple web-based and office automation tools that are affordable for small businesses. I designed the

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<sup>1</sup> A Business Case for Improved Project Practices by Jim Brosseau, Software Productivity Center Inc. Version 1.11 ([www.spc.ca](http://www.spc.ca))

PM methodology Cheetah Project Management because I saw a need for people to learn about Project Management quickly and be able to apply it immediately.

### Getting Started with Your PM Power Checklist

1. Know the business drivers for your business and where it's most important to apply PM techniques first.
2. Decide on a simple and proven approach to PM. If you choose something too complicated, no one will follow it.
3. Have people at every level learn the skills needed to effectively use PM to improve their value to your business. And again, if you're a team of four, even better – then everyone can learn PM.
4. Get big wins early on by leading with the folks who have the least skills in Project Management and the most to gain by using a simple PM approach.
5. Empower people with tools for successful PM:
  - a. BOT International's Custom Websystem for sharing Best Practices and PM processes across your business.
  - b. MS Project or FastTrackSchedule for simple and effective project scheduling and tracking.
  - c. PM Scorecards to measure the effectiveness of your Project Managers throughout the project.
6. Consider having professionals in your organization get PMP® certified. Not because it's a hot certification that is in vogue right now, but because your bottom line will thank you.

### ROI: PM's Impact on the Bottom Line

PM impacts the bottom line. In their CHAOS Report, the Standish Group conservatively estimates that 20% of money spent on projects is wasted because companies don't have a consistent approach to PM. Research by the CBP shows that PM improvement initiatives improve project performance by up to 50% for the first project and can continue for each new project if the enterprise offers ongoing support with PM tools.

### What You Can Expect

When PM gains traction in your organization, it can be transformational. Here are five results that you can expect from PM integration.

1. **Speed as a Competitive Advantage:** Today, people work on cross-functional teams to complete projects. Small businesses often partner with other companies as subcontractors. When people from different companies know and understand a common PM process to get their work done, they can start to work together without having to design a way to do it.



**2. A Confidence Booster and Goal Accelerator:** When there is a common, simple approach for PM and the correct tools are available to people, they are empowered to reach their goals, together and individually. Our students who get their PMPs tell us that the PMP increases their confidence in their ability to get things done.

**3. Say Goodbye to Reinventing the Wheel:** Industry-standard PM practices require a critical project closeout phase that collects lessons learned and gives your team powerful historical knowledge to apply to the next project. You never have to reinvent the wheel again!

**4. Action and Completion:** An easy-to-use PM methodology gives your business a framework that makes it achievable for people to move from vision to action with a comprehensive project plan that supports their objectives.

**5. Insight You Can Immediately Apply.** You capture best practices and know what is and isn't working for you, giving you a competitive advantage by turning information into insight that your team can immediately apply to the next project.

## Small Is the New Big

There's never been a better time to be a small business owner. We can move at the speed of our ideas. And with the power of PM behind you, there's no business goal you can't reach!

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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. In 2006, The Project Management Institute, [www.pmi.org](http://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. With a B.S. in Aerospace Engineering, and an M.S. in Mechanical Engineering, LaBrosse has done extensive postgraduate work with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Center for Advanced Educational Studies and with the University of Washington Industrial Engineering Program in accelerating adult learning with respect to meeting core business objectives. 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](#).