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Spring Cleaning Your Work and Your Life

by Michelle LaBrosse, PMP®

April is a great month for the project manager in all of us. We can look back at the first three months of the year and assess where we are with our projects both at work and at home.

When we think of the words “Spring Cleaning,” many of us tend to think of taking large garbage bags and doing a purge of the clutter in our lives. While that is tempting, the old garbage bag approach is just a quick fix and doesn’t address why the clutter is there. Instead, we want to develop long-term solutions that help you keep your projects moving along and make sure you enjoy the success you deserve.

Here are my seven favorite tips when I look at applying my knowledge of Project Management to the notion of Spring Cleaning.

1. Probe the Pile

If there’s always a pile (or multiple ones!) in your workspace or home, the question is what’s in the pile? When you actually sort through a pile, you’ll find the answer to a missing link in your system. For example, if you sort through a large pile on your desk and there are several articles that you want to read, receipts that need to be scanned and a lot of unopened mail, the question is – do you have a system for dealing with each of those things? Create places and systems for the clutter in your life, and it will disappear.

2. Think Before You Print

Electronic filing systems are not just green, they really help you to keep your projects on track. If you’re constantly printing out paper before you’ve made a decision on how to act on that document, you may just be printing out of habit and not because you need to. Pause before you print, and you’ll find less paper to distract you, and you’ll only have what you need in front of you.

3. Cultivate Everyday Actions

Spring Cleaning really can’t be a once-a-year activity. For you to be effective, you have to cultivate everyday actions. If you look at your project goals, what is the most important thing you can do today to move you closer to that goal? When you talk to authors, they almost always talk about the importance of writing everyday. Even when they are not writing a book, they continue to exercise the muscle so it’s supple and ready. What do you need to be doing every day to meet your goals and to make sure you’re not just taking stock of

your progress once a season? Make milestones an important part of every project – no matter the size. Everyday actions are what connect today to your long-term goals.

4. Right Brain Meet the Left Brain

Cleaning is not just about “clearing the decks.” It’s also about cleaning up misunderstandings and aligning a team. One thing that works very well on teams is to assign two polar opposites to each other with the sole mission of learning about each other. Assign your resident neat freak to work with your resident master pile maker. Their assignment is to spend a day working together and observing each other. How do they each do their jobs differently? At the end of the day, what did they learn from each other? The point you want them to understand is that everyone contributes differently and uniquely to a team, and we all can learn from each other when we make the time to do it.

5. Remove the Clutter from your Mind

When I’m managing teams and I see that someone is not performing, it’s often because there is something bothering them that is taking up a lot of energy and cluttering their mind. Life can throw us all curve balls, so this happens to the best of us. The key is to remove that clutter as quickly as possible. Is there a tough conversation that you’re dreading and you keep putting off? Is there a conflict on your team or in your family that you haven’t resolved? Ask yourself what’s taking up too much space in your own personal hard drive and delete it as soon as possible. Nothing feels more liberating and spring-like than to be on the other side of something you’ve been thinking too much about.

6. Take the Hoover to your Relationships

Spaces are not the only things that require Spring Cleaning. Relationships do, too. Sometimes when we get too busy, we neglect the care and feeding of our relationships with our team members and family members. If there is someone who’s been on your mind, now’s the time to make that call and have that discussion. Is there a team member who isn’t working well on your team? Now’s the time to clear the air and find out why. Are you in a rut at home with your family? Surprise them and break out of your routine. Small changes can speak volumes to the people you work with and the people you love.

7. Reward Yourself

Once you have your personal and professional house in order, don’t forget to reward yourself. Whether it’s an online course at Cheetah Learning to put you on the fast track or a day off to be a tourist in your own town, take the time to recognize your own achievements.

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*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. You can also get your career in gear with *CheetahWare*, free Project Management tools from Cheetah Learning.*

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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, 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*.