Effective Project Communications

~ By Gina Lijoi

I was recently invited to speak at a conference in Singapore on Effective Project Communications. I’m unable to attend, so I wanted to share my insights on this very important topic in a blog entry.

As a project manager, communication will occur in many forms, with many individuals, including project stakeholders, your internal team, management within your organisation, vendors, and more. Communication may happen verbally or through email, as well as through charters and project plans, addenda and status reports. These long lists are a small indication of the significance of communication to a project manager. In this entry, I’ll suggest some simple methods for maintaining clear communication efficiently with all parties involved.

Let People Know

Your project plan should include an outline for an ongoing contact strategy, meaning how you will communicate with your team and client, how often and in what form. This could be presented through a simple chart explaining that there will be a weekly status call from you to the client each Monday morning with written action items as a follow-up. Regardless of the details, the point is to set-up expectations by describing your intent before the project commences. This will allow the team and the clients to request a different approach if they feel it would be more effective. People feel confident when they understand what to expect.

Repeating Never Hurts

When decisions or direction is provided verbally, whether it’s to your team or your client, always restate these items in writing. The minute details of a project are numerous, what may seem understood today may be forgotten tomorrow. Never take this for granted - do your due diligence by recording and distributing actionable items and decisions for the team. A simple email will often suffice, and having a paper trail of a critical path can prove invaluable when important details get lost in the shuffle.

Get to the Point

A rule I insist my project managers follow is to be as concise as possible. When team members or stakeholders read an email, for example, they are skimming the contents for some key items:

- Has anything I need to know about happened?
- How does it affect me?
- Am I expected to do something?
- When?
Cover off these basics and leave the rest for a deeper discussion. Always get to the point quickly, providing only as much background information as is necessary to explain your issue.

Communication is something I think about every day. I ask myself if my messages are clear, if I've provided sufficient context, and if I've made my expectations for any outcome apparent. As with most critical PM skills, communication is something that can be improved continuously. Putting some standard practices in place to force yourself into a repeatable communication pattern will ensure consistency, if nothing else.

Gina Lijoi has worked in the online space for eight years, and is currently the Director of Fulfilment at WebFeat Multimedia Inc., in Toronto. In this role, Gina is responsible for strategy, methodology, pricing, scoping and execution of client initiatives. She is passionate about how marketing is affected by technology and trends in social media. Her blog can be found at http://ginalijoi.blogspot.co.uk