Nine Ways to Contribute to Project Team Success

~ By Kevin Eikenberry

The world of work has changed. It used to be that most of us worked as a part of a process, whether on an assembly line, managing interactions with customers, or any one of a thousand other processes. Processes are ongoing, repeatable and never have an ending.

While there will always be some jobs and tasks which are process focused, most work now is a project or has a project component to it. Any task that has a distinct beginning and ending, or follows a specific life cycle is a project. Examples include: planning a company meeting, writing a new brochure, implementing the new software system, etc.

If the nature of our work has changed, it is important to think about some of the skills that will help us succeed in this different world. Here are nine ways you can contribute more effectively to make the projects you work on more successful, regardless of your specific role.

1. Understand the end goal. Since a project has a defined ending, it is important that each contributor to the effort knows the desired end result. Stephen Covey teaches to "begin with the end in mind." This is clearly important to project team members. By understanding the desired result, you can make better individual decisions and reduce confusion and re-work.

2. Identify clear roles. Each person is an important piece in the overall project puzzle. Know your role and the roles of others. If you are a project leader, take the time to clarify these roles for everyone. If you aren't a leader, ask until you really understand how you can best contribute.

3. Collaborate. Project work is often fluid and free flowing. Once you understand your role and the roles of others you are in a position to collaborate with them more successfully. This collaboration isn't just a nice thing for you to do. It is imperative to the ultimate success of the project. Look for ways and be willing to collaborate.

4. Recognise interdependencies. The bigger the project, the more linked and interdependent are the people and the tasks. Certain steps need to be done before others can be completed. If you see only your small piece of the project, you may not realise how you finishing two days sooner might have a huge impact on several other things staying on track. Conversely if you fall two days behind on one of your tasks, the effects on the end results could be much longer delays. You aren't an island. Your work products, decisions and efforts affect many others. Recognise and work with the interdependencies between you and the others involved in the project.

5. Ask questions. Projects can be complex. Don't be afraid to ask questions to know more about any of the things mentioned above.

6. Communicate. Asking questions is communicating, but so is giving updates. Checking in with others. Co-ordinating schedules. If you are a project leader the importance of communication can't be overstated.
If you are any team member other than the leader, communication is just as important. You can’t leave it to the leader. Check in with others. Get their input. Find out when the pieces you will need will be completed. Update people on your progress. Communicate!

7. **Break it down.** Take the big project steps and break them down into definable tasks that you can get your hands around. By breaking the tasks down the work won’t feel so daunting, you will find the interdependencies and you will be able to stay on track much more successfully. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. Break down the overall project, and your individual steps into bite sized pieces.

8. **Look at the past.** If a version of this project has been done in the past, look for the lessons learned to improve your results this time. Think too about other projects you have been involved in. Even if the project was smaller or larger and the goals were very different, there are likely lessons you learned that you can apply - things you did well that you would want to repeat, and things you could have done better that you can correct on this project.

9. **Look to the future.** Take a little time to document the best practices and ideas that work for you during the project. Whether this is a formal task for everyone on the project, or just your own notes to help you to continuously improve, investing a little time now will make your contributions to all future projects more valuable and efficient.

There are many more ways you can contribute to great project success. Take these nine ideas as a starting point - as a checklist of things you can do, regardless of the role you play. Taking action on these ideas will help you feel more confident and successful in your role on the project team, and will help the project’s goals be reached much more successfully.

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