The ABC's of Project Management for Project Managers

By William Thom

I recently watched a very interesting independent film (on DVD) that sparked a thought. The 1992 film "Glengarry Glen Ross" is a movie about some desperate salesmen in a desperate situation. Alec Baldwin, who plays Blake, engages in an extremely abusive diatribe with the sales team in which he exclaims "A-B-C. A-Always, B-Be, C-Closing. Always be closing, always be closing." Having been in a sales role in a previous life I had heard this before, but I reflected on this for a moment. Then I asked myself, "Are there ABC's for Project Management?"

Digging deep into my collective resources on project management I found the document that I intended use for the basis of this article. It was titled "The Competencies for Project Managers" and I thought for sure it was going to provide information that would benefit project managers in all industries. It turned out after reading this document again that it was an eye opening experience for me. Though I had seen this information before in a presentation, looking at it again I discovered why the PMO in the corporation failed. The competencies listed did not tie back to any project management competencies pertaining to PMBOK or any other project management methodology including the very own project management solution the corporation paid for. In fact, the competencies were so generalised they could be used for a typical manager's role. But being an optimist, I have a solution so let's delve into that.

As project managers I feel we should follow the same ABC's that salesmen do but in a different perspective "Always Be Closing." Now let's break this into parameters that apply to Project Managers, this is an action oriented item. Think of all that a project manager is responsible for. First a quick review of the project management process groups, they consist of:

- Initiating
- Planning
- Executing
- Monitoring and Controlling
- Closing

"Always be closing" in each of the project process groups. In each of these groups, there are a number of items that need to be addressed. Get them on your list or get them into the project plan and work on closing the action items. Always Be Closing!

In addition to the process groups there are the nine knowledge areas of Project Management which consist of:

- Integration Management
- Scope Management
- Time Management
- Cost Management
- Quality Management
- Human Resource Management
- Communications Management
- Risk Management
- Procurement Management

For each of these groups there are items that may be determined necessary for the success of a project. Again, identify what needs to be done, get in the plan or on the task list and "Always Be Closing."
There are more ABC's of project management to keep in mind for the success of a project. The next ABC on the list is "Always Be Courteous." In respect to this, it is good to remember that as project managers we are also responsible for interpersonal understanding and customer service. Interpersonal understanding involves the workings of individuals and knowing how to get the best out of the individuals on the team. I personally like the DISC Personality Profile method of learning about your team resources. In regards to customer service, if you place yourself in the customer service role for a moment, as a project manager you are in a service role and the team members are customers. Kindness and understanding will get you farther than bitterness and intolerance.

Next on the list of ABC's is "Always be Considerate." This is not similar to the courteous guidance. This is directed towards the impact and influence of a project manager. Here is where a project manager should be considerate of the organisation and understand the need for relationship building. If a project manager is aware of the organisational goals and its mission, the project manager can reinforce this when the going gets tough on projects. When it comes to relationship building, as a project manager, we may need to influence these relationships in order to have an impact on the project success by incorporating the sound practices of project management. The advantages of sound process benefit the current projects and provide valuable information for future projects.

This next ABC is around the managerial side of project management and that is "Always Be Cultivating." The focus of this topic is around teamwork, developing others, team leadership and being assertive. As a project manager we are in a leadership role that is responsible for the team success as well as the project success. There are times when we may need to develop others either with mentoring or training in order to get the best results from the team resources. We need to realise that when new teams are created there is the typical forming, norming, storming and conforming. In this situation (and others) we need to provide the leadership, persuasive assertiveness and use of personal power to keep the focus on the goals of the project and strive for co-operation.

The next ABC for project managers is "Always Be Cognitive." This is the area where project managers must be up for analytical and conceptual thinking. In regards to analytical thinking, as project managers we will be dealing with various problems and complex situations. There is the need to be able to scrutinise the information and break it down into discernible facts that can deliver a solution to a situation. This is not a task specific to the project manager, this may require the team to gather and discuss the situation and follow the process to break it down and resolve it. It should be the project manager who is able to recognise this and take the necessary action. Conceptual thinking on the other hand may involve experience or training to provide solutions. It's not based purely on fact but it also takes into consideration intuitive processes, creativity and inductive reasoning. I feel that this is where an organisation may consider Agile Project Management, be advised that this requires a specific type of project management mindset in order to be successful.

There are two more ABC's to consider so let's keep going. "Always Be Competent." This has four areas for consideration, self-control, self-confidence, flexibility and organisational commitment. These are pretty self explanatory yet, let's take a moment for review. Self-control is huge for the project manager as we face the issues and risks that arise during the course of a project. If we maintain our composure in the face of challenge we reflect our ability to take charge and keep a project on course. Self-confidence is an area that ties in a project manager's ability to be in control of his surroundings and be confident in the outcome. It is our ability to respond positively to a situation versus react with inability. The point here is to take the time you may need to think and respond accordingly. There will be times that you will be asked to find a solution, respond with what actions you may take to resolve the issue and give it a time frame. Flexibility, this is a broad topic that takes into account resources and the triple constraints of project management. Be aware of this and determine how to manage it with consideration for the success of a project. How much flexibility exists is dependent on the type of project being managed. Organisational commitment is when you work to improve the organisation not the financial condition of your wallet.

Last but not least, "Always Be Communicating." Put this hand in hand with "Always Be Closing." This topic was not even on the original list of competencies but it is certainly very important. As project managers we must be on top of project communications among the members of the team and we must communicate the proper project reporting that feeds up the chain. Though it is good to get things out to the team in an e-mail, be sure to talk to team members on the phone or in person, especially if you have tasked them to do something. I'm not sure I like the word "tasked." why don't we just remove the "T" and follow-up on what you "asked" them to do. Communications is so important; we should be persuasive in our communication methods in order to encourage the best response from those on the team. I'll say it here, that you won't find me peeling a lemon and passing it out as a team snack. But add some sweetener and water and you'll cool down even the most heated thirst. And really, that's what we want to do, we want to make the project work, we want the project
to be successful. You should display goodness and kindness in your communications if you want it to be effective. There is a time and place to handle difficult team members, communicate in a manner that elicits the best productivity from your resources and measure the results.

Let's take a moment to recap this information. What we have reviewed here are seven ABC's of project management for project managers. Here is a list of them:

1. Always be Closing
2. Always be Courteous
3. Always be Considerate
4. Always be Cultivating
5. Always be Cognitive
6. Always be Competent
7. Always be Communicating

You may want to take the time to reread this article, take some notes compare this to your current actions and see if you can improve your results. If there is something you could do to improve the success of your project, or your project team or the organisation, is there something that your have learned here that can assist you? I would certainly like to hear from you. Likewise, I would certainly enjoy hearing about your experiences.

More information about me is available via Linkedin, feel free to look up William M. Thom - MISM, PMP. I can also be found on Facebook www.facebook.com/people/William-M-Thom/1310100994

© Project Smart 2000-2010. All rights reserved.