

Building a product may require as much attention and intentionality as is needed during the birthing process of a newborn. The cohesion of every party involved is very critical to successful childbirth and a healthy child. As a project manager, you are like the chief surgeon that guides everyone to a successful operation and ensures that the product meets the requirements.

Making sure that everyone on the team, works in tandem and is coordinated, is your most important job as a skilled project manager. This crucial aspect could also be the most difficult part for even the best.

So, as project manager, how can you handle your team without stress and without compromising the product? Here are 5 things to do.

### 1. Perfect The Process

I have worked with a team that specialises in building tech products, as a project manager. When we started, project managers simply went with the flow of transferring information from end to end as they deem fit. Every project manager had their way of doing things, the Dev team was often confused about channels of communication, different methodologies, and generally, a continuously changing experience with each project manager. Where did that get us? you may ask. We spent up to 12 months on projects that could be concluded within 3 months! Of course, as the months dragged on, morale was lost, people became snappy, and we produced a dysfunctional product because requirements were constantly shifting, and there was no documented process for mitigating this issue.

Before long, I learnt one lesson which became a game-changer for the team. The lesson was: *Your process is the fulcrum upon which your product will find its balance.* Without a good process, your team will become disoriented and once you are working with a disoriented team, your product will be a mess! However, no project process is set in stone, the key is to find what works for your team and keep using and fine-tuning till you have a perfect fit. The next thing to do is to document your process. A process that is not written does not exist! Finally, ensure you run *process drills*. Your executive team and to some extent the client, need to be as intimately acquainted with the project management process as you are. Run them through workshops, and simulations of the entire process. Gather their feedback to fine-tune the process further, because they are key parts of the entire process and once there's no agreement, there's bound to be a default on the team which will lead to continuous disarray.

### 2. Know Your People

As a project manager, you typically work with stakeholders ranging from the client to developers to business analysts to users to executives, etc. One thing to never forget

is that all of these stakeholders are first 'people' with opinions, emotions, personalities, temperaments, etc. once this is established in your mind, you would be better prepared to effectively collaborate with them. At the risk of sounding redundant, *your people are as important as your product*. Understanding each individual will go a long way in setting the right tone for the project execution. If possible, before the project commences, if you haven't already had a solid relationship, especially with your executive team, take some time out to get acquainted with each person. Once you have established a relationship, you would be saved from the stressor effect of possible tension and issues that may arise during project execution. When all else fails, you can easily invite Bob, the DevOps guy to catch up during a lunch break in a less tense atmosphere.

In handling people, you have to be both perceptive and diplomatic. On the client end of things, your perception will come in handy, as you might be unable to spend time with them outside of the project, depending on the work culture of your organisation. It takes the ability to be able to balance firmness with friendliness to have a great client-project manager relationship and as a matter of fact, a stakeholders-project manager relationship.

### 3. Prioritise Your Objectives

Oftentimes, the disparity in view about how a project should be executed and what should be seen as the most important specification(s) in a project, could lead to conflicts, particularly between a project manager and the client. Since on most projects, you have to work with limited resources, one most important step to take is to work with all stakeholders to prioritize requirements. This step could be spearheaded by a business analyst or the project manager in a case where there's no business analyst on the team. This step could be the difference between dealing with scope creep and having a smooth run.

Prioritising will allow for effective human and non-human resource management and in cases where all objectives are essential, you can work with a phased product release or project execution. You can work on prioritisation using methods such as the *Eisenhower Matrix* to decide on important and urgent objectives. An important point to note is that this process should be carried out with all stakeholders present.

### 4. Communicate Constantly

As they say, in any relationship, *communication is key*. The core of a project manager's job is effective communication. This quality will resolve a lot of issues before they are even formed. However, constant communication is of greater importance, whenever there's a lag in communication with stakeholders, there's a disconnect that could lead to disruption in the execution process. Communication

lines should be constantly open to prevent a loss of information. I worked with a client who claimed to have included certain requirements within the project that was never executed. I was saved by proper documentation of our conversations in an email thread and upon sending screenshots of conversations of the time being referred to, a possible project disruption was avoided. Countless tools could aid effective communication, such as Slack, Email; project management tools, like Asana, Trello, Jira, etc. However, if communication is not constant, important details could be lost and conflicts may arise as a result.

#### 5. Be Creative and Confident

Finally, the role of a project manager is a leadership role. When you see yourself as a leader, you are halfway to becoming a great people manager. Your adeptness at solving problems, being creative about issues that arise within the project or amidst the people will tell a lot about the success of your project.

Every one of the stakeholders to a large extent sources their belief in the successful execution of the project, from your own belief. Your confidence feeds theirs, which in turn inspires everyone involved to give their best at all times.

Your role as a project manager could turn out to be the most important part of the project team.