



GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Senior project managers should live up to a higher standard.

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It's often said that the main difference between the job description of a project manager and a senior project manager is the number of projects he or she runs, along with the projects' size and complexity.

Although these factors can come into play, that description does not adequately identify the differences.

I have certain expectations for senior project managers that I don't have for those who are less experienced:

- 1. Mentor less-senior personnel.** There is no better way to learn a craft than with assistance from a mentor—especially when you're first starting out. Senior project managers should mentor those around them in aspects of the profession such as leadership, methodology, tools, people skills and navigating politics.
- 2. Evaluate performance.** A senior project manager has the skills to know what is expected of a project manager and should be able to help evaluate that person's performance—especially since management often seeks their skills, opinions and recommendations.
- 3. Identify project management-related training needs.** They should be able to evaluate the readiness of a project team or organization and then recommend the related training required to ensure the effective application of project management and leadership principles.
- 4. Conduct training.** A senior project manager must be able to teach many of the skills required for the successful planning, execution, delivery and support of projects and their products or services. They must also qualify project management training vendors and monitor their delivery and effectiveness.
- 5. Perform project reviews.** They should have the ability to either individually assess the health of a project or lead a small team in doing so. Part of this is to be able to net the review findings so that the most important problem areas, as well as most noteworthy areas for praise, are clearly identified.
- 6. Turn troubled projects around.** Any project manager with satisfactory performance should, for the most part, be able to turn around small and some medium-sized troubled projects. But a senior project manager should be able to turn around *any*-size troubled project in his or her industry.
- 7. Help hire or place project managers.** A senior project manager can significantly contribute in the interview and selection of new project management hires. More-

over, he or she can be called upon to determine the placement of project managers onto specific projects.

8. Make continuous improvement a priority. They should have a solid grasp of basic and advanced project management principles, along with having experience in successfully applying and advancing those principles. Continuous improvement is a distinctive characteristic of higher-level project managers.

9. Think like a businessperson. Project management is mostly about business. A senior project manager should understand the business need for each project and make ongoing decisions based on what's best for the organization—even if that means challenging senior stakeholders on critical success factors.

10. Be a role model for integrity. Integrity is not optional. However, many project managers are shaky in taking the initiative to ensure a project is always being run effectively and with proper governance. Senior project managers should champion the promotion of integrity in all endeavors.

Whether you hope to become a senior project manager or already are one, how do you stack up against these expectations? **PM**



Neal Whitten, PMP, president of The Neal Whitten Group, is a speaker, trainer, consultant and mentor. His newest book is *The Gift of Wisdom: Lessons for a Lifetime*.