

Beware of the Hidden Stakeholder



Don Rimmer is a Project Manager with the Lower Hudson Regional Information Center in Elmsford and an Adjunct Faculty member at the College of Westchester in White Plains. He lives in Yorktown Heights with his wife Della and their daughter Amelia.

LET'S FACE IT - we all fast-track projects, especially the "easy" ones. I did just that several years ago with one of my smaller projects. What made it a good candidate was that the work was very well-defined and straightforward.

Of course I had taken care to pay attention to all the details and carefully define the bill of materials as well as the scope of work, and I made sure that I got the required signatures before ordering any materials or scheduling any labor. Everything was going well and the materials began to arrive on site, just as planned. I was heading to a status meeting when the bomb dropped.

The project was taking place in a leased space, and even though the organization technically was well within its rights to implement this project, the director of the facility from whom the space was leased began to balk. He complained that he wasn't notified of this work taking place and questioned its impact on the facility. Even though it would have none, we were in no position to argue as that clearly would have made matters worse and brought the project to a standstill.

As if to add insult to injury, when I questioned the sponsor who signed off on the project, I received a terse response that the director of the leased facility had no say in the matter since the space was being paid for and they could do as they pleased. Bear in mind that this statement held water, especially since the work was non-intrusive in manner, but I suddenly found myself where no project manager wants to be, but where we often find ourselves: between two warring parties.

After a lot of explanation and several meetings and phone calls, we managed to placate the director of the facility and allay whatever fears he had. The project began and ended as planned, and was actually quite successful.

Both my colleagues and I were in agreement that this situation was not easy to see coming. After all, I had held several very thorough planning meetings with all stakeholders of whom I knew, clearly defined the scope, and had a signature. In other words, it was a done deal. It wouldn't be easy to see this other person coming out of the proverbial woodwork. Even if I had held an initial stakeholders' meeting (remember this project was fast-tracked to a certain degree) I am not sure that he would have been in attendance.

The only thing that I believe I could have done differently was to take a step back and take into consideration that this was a leased space and the landlord may have some concerns that we need to address. My assumption was that since we had already been operating there, these things were already established and didn't need to be addressed.

In addition to this type of "hidden" stakeholder, there can surely be others who surface at some point in projects. I now make sure to ask at the first meeting if all of the required players are at the table, and if there are others who have a stake in the project, however minor that may be. And yes, I also ask if we need anyone's permission to do the work other than the sponsor.

Another lesson learned is that fast-tracking can cause issues. But even without fast-tracking a project, such an issue can arise and therefore we need to ask the right questions and dig a bit deeper.

"The Critical Path" Inside this Month's Issue

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Letter from the President



Houston, we have a problem.

When Tom Hanks, as Commander Jim Lovell, spoke those iconic words in the movie Apollo 13, our hearts stopped. As we panicked, though, scores of engineers and rocket scientists in Mission Control leapt into action. Armed with slide rules, they worked out an alternate plan to get the 3 crew members aboard the stricken spacecraft safely back to Earth, in spite of the loss of its primary power supply. In doing so, they demonstrated. In doing so, they demonstrated the best practices in problem management by recognizing changed circumstances, setting new criteria for success and rationally evaluating and devising alternate plans to achieve the new goal.

As we know, in later years, NASA did not repeat this superb performance during the Space Shuttle program. Mission commanders chose to discount warnings from mission personnel that resulted in the loss of both craft and crew of the Challenger, in 1986 and the Columbia in 2003. In both cases, a critical issue was identified and communicated up the chain of command – but the mission went on as planned – and catastrophe resulted.

In both cases, the failure was not one of risk management but of issues management. The risks were identified, monitored and detected. What failed was the risk response – instead of being recognized and responded to, the facts were simply ignored in hope that the worst would not happen.

How many times have we seen hope employed as a substitute for a costly, and perhaps embarrassing preventive action? While the stakes are not typically ones of life or death, it happens far too often. The more important question, though, is why should it ever happen? What circumstances would cause rational, well trained and educated professionals to allow catastrophe to be an option?

In my experience, the root cause of such failures is a lack of trust. Recognizing and responding to changed circumstances requires that we trust our senses, and those of our team mates. It also requires that we trust that when we raise an issue, it will be taken seriously and we won't be attacked for whatever discomfort may ensue. When faced with a serious project issue, a project manager must be able to trust that the project stakeholders will accept a more limited definition of success if that is what circumstances dictate. Finally, everyone on the team must have enough trust in each other's judgment and wisdom to work through the options for dealing with the problem in a rational, blame free way, and be able to work together to address the issue without rancor. Without trust in place at all levels, it is often easier to ignore problems than to really handle them.

By extension, job number one for every leader is to instill a culture of trust and integrity across one's organization. Trust building takes time and energy – but its ultimate rewards are immense. When people trust each other, they can listen without prejudice, present disagreements without rancor and resolve differences without extensive argument and accusation. When a resolution is settled on, they can move ahead as a team to affect it. With trust in place, a team sees problems not as blemishes to be hidden, but as challenges that the team can surmount.

See you at the June Chapter Meeting!

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President, PMI Westchester

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Who Keeps You On Track?

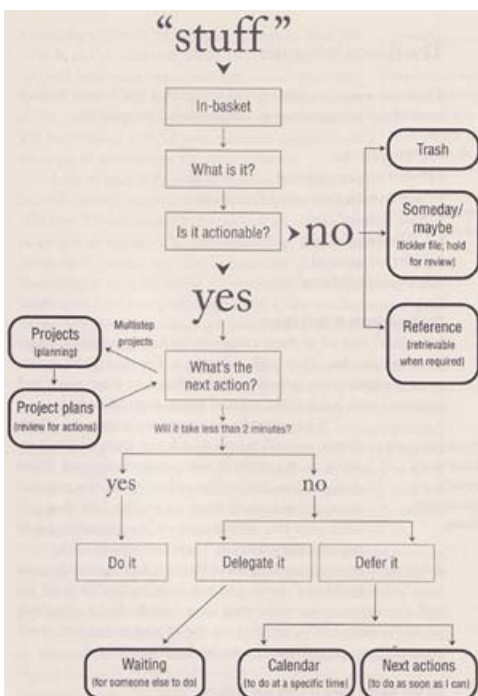


Stacey Berlow is a software product consultant and founder of Project Balance. With over 18 years of product and project management and she has successfully directed multi-million, large-scale, multinational, and offshore IT development projects. Stacey is a member of the Westchester PMI Chapter and lives in White Plains, NY.

Plains, NY.

One of my jobs in my project management practice is to remind people of various things – meeting times, due dates for work completed or documents, etc. This is an important part of my work and keeping people organized is definitely a factor in the success of my projects. As well, this reminder task helps me gauge if people are on track for delivering their work product as scheduled. Unfortunately for me, it's a little bit like the cobbler's children not having shoes. My sock drawer is a mess and my desk often looks like an avalanche hit it. While I'm very task driven, I'm not inherently organized. So who's keeping me on track?

Over time I have developed tools and techniques to keep me organized. I'm sure you have your own techniques (and it would be wonderful if you could email me and I could share your ideas with our chapter members.) One little book that I have referred to many times is called "Getting things done" by David Allen. He suggests a process (see diagram below) that directs you to see if something that requires your attention is actionable or not. If it isn't then throw it away or put it away. If it does require action and takes less than 2 minutes, then do it immediately. Otherwise you must delegate the task or defer it.



Getting Things Done, David Allen, 2001, Penguin Books, Page 138

For many of us, our tasks take more than a few minutes and must be documented and tracked. If you delegate a task, then you need to track it in a "waiting" queue. If you are responsible for the task and you defer it, you need to track it – and that's where my task list reviews and reminders come into play. I find action or task lists really help to keep me organized and I leverage them the hilt.

Tracking team tasks

- For every project, as part of the meeting minutes document, I create a task list. I either cut and paste this into a master document where I can track all of the projects I manage, or I simply print it out and check things off. Your tasks should also be included in these action lists
- I check the project task lists every few days; I check the overall schedule for each project on a weekly basis.

Tracking your own tasks

- For my own tasks, I use a master list that I write by hand. You could put this into a softcopy list. I enjoy the satisfaction of physically crossing the activity off my list. I recreate the master list about every week.
- On a daily basis I write down the work items I must do that day, in priority order. This helps me to keep focused on those tasks during the day.

Reminders

- When you set up a meeting for a group, at the same time set up a second reminder meeting one or two days before the team meeting - just for you. This second meeting will remind you to send out an email to remind the team participants about the upcoming meeting.
- If you know an email must go out at a future date with specific information, such as an announcement of an event or availability of a product, pre-write the announcement and have it ready to go in your Drafts box. If you are sure about the date, content and distribution list of the email, then schedule your email application to automatically send the email out. (See Outlook Help: Delay the delivery of a single message.)

We all have organization survival techniques, whether you like your sock drawer to have your socks perfectly aligned and color coded or you're like me, a bit of a mess. Being a project manager doesn't mean that these organizational skills come easy. Using the electronic and paper tools at hand as well as applying a few simple techniques can really help you to keep you on track.

Procrastination – Detection and Avoidance



Mr. O'Brochta, who has managed hundreds of projects during the past thirty years, is also an experienced line manager, author, lecturer, trainer and consultant. He holds a master's degree in project management, a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, and is certified as a PMP®. As Zozer Inc. President, he is

helping organizations raise their level of project management performance. As senior project manager at the CIA, he led the project management and systems engineering training and certification program to mature practices agency-wide. Mr. O'Brochta's other recent work includes leading the development of standards and courses for the new U.S. Federal Acquisition Certification for Program and Project Managers; he co-authored a comprehensive FAC-P/PM study. He serves at the PMI corporate level on the ethics Code Implementation Advisory Committee and at the chapter level where he built and led the international PMIWDC Chapter-to-Chapter program; he is a graduate of PMI's Leadership Institute Mater Class.

An Introduction

I have come to think of project management as the language of getting things done. It strikes me as being very much results oriented; focused on the end item deliverable product or service. And for project managers who fully embrace the techniques of breaking work down into manageable tasks the focus involves not just achieving the final outcome, but accomplishing all of the intermediate activities as well. This, after all, is the foundation of the best practice of critical path management.

So why then do we encounter project management situations involving procrastination? Are some project managers putting off doing things because of habitual carelessness or laziness? What is the impact of procrastination when it does occur? How can we recognize procrastination; and how can we prevent it?

For project management procrastination is when a planned task or activity does not begin when scheduled or when an action or decision is not made when it needs to. For the project manager procrastination may occur because of personal attributes such as carelessness or laziness, however, it is doubtful that a significant number of project managers with these characteristics remain project managers but for so long. Procrastination for project managers who have remained in the profession for a significant length of time is more likely to occur for other reasons; it is more likely to occur as a result of wishful thinking (if I just wait a bit things will improve), or as the result of fear (if I act now I may make a mistake), or as the result of a strategy to reduce risk (if I delay the odds of success improve).

It is difficult to tell just how common procrastination is in project management because when it occurs communication barriers can obscure it. For example, is a failure to hold a critical design review as scheduled the result of procrastination or the result of a considered, deliberate, informed decision? The question is hard to answer because if the project manager does not communicate a clear basis or rationale for the delay, it could be due to either cause. However, if they can't or won't communicate a clear basis for the delay then perhaps we can correctly assume that some procrastination is taking place.

A Story

Let me illustrate the impact of project manager procrastination with a story. This is story about a dramatic and fatal example of procrastination that occurred in World War II during a project made quite famous by the 1963 movie starring Steve McQueen titled "The Great Escape." Author Mark Kozak-Holland writes about this project in his 2007 book titled "Project Lessons from The Great Escape." He calls the readers attention to the fateful night of March 24/25 in 1944 when during the escape from a German prisoner of war camp a series of significant setbacks occur (frozen trap door, tunnel too short, air raid, cave-ins) causing prisoners who are waiting to crawl through the tunnel to freedom to be delayed and for their progress to be slowed from the planned sixty escapees per hour to only twelve men per hour. In the end only 3 men actually escaped and made it to freedom, two-dozen men were captured and returned to prison camp, and fifty men were captured and executed. Central to the project outcome was the procrastination by the project manager Roger Bushell during that auspicious night. Why didn't he take action to minimize the impact of the setbacks when they occurred? Was it wishful thinking – if I just wait a bit things will improve? Why didn't he abort the escape when so many things went wrong? Why did his stellar leadership during the planning for the escape become supplanted with procrastination during implementation?

This next story about project manager procrastination is more personal. This story has drama and fatalities too; it occurred in January 2003 during a climb I was making of Mount Aconcagua, the highest mountain in South America. During a three-week period as our climbing team inched our way up over twenty thousand feet we and everyone else on the mountain were hammered by a severe storm. Hurricane force tent-destroying winds, sub-zero frostbiting temperatures, and head-pounding lack of oxygen in the thin air combined to cause seven fatalities. Or did they? I question whether these fatalities, which occurred in climbing teams other than our own, were really due to the conditions. I submit that procrastination contributed to the one fatality that we became personally involved with, perhaps others as well.

(continued on page 5)

Procrastination – Detection and Avoidance (continued)

At five o'clock one morning during a brief lull in the storm a solo climber wandered into our camp quite disoriented and fatigued. He had left his climbing guide higher up on the mountain – dead. They had used the storm lull the previous day to make a summit attempt. When they had not reached their objective by their predetermined turnaround time the climbing guide, ie. project manager, procrastinated. He did not turn around. He kept going. The barely surviving climber had spent the night alone wandering around the upper mountain and only by chance wandered into our camp where we took the actions necessary to save his life. Why didn't the project manager turn around as planned? Was it wishful thinking – if I just keep going things will improve and we will make it to the top? Why did the project manager procrastinate?

While few of our projects may involve the risk of loss of life procrastination can still have damaging consequences. Failure to proceed as planned can lead to schedule slips and associated cost growth, it can snowball and lead to delays in delivery of critical capability, and it can ripple across many of the dependencies that other projects and programs have on ours causing difficulties for the whole system, enterprise, or network.

What To Do

Recognition of procrastination is clouded by the assortment of communication barriers that can be associated with the project manager. Consequently, procrastination is likely easier to observe over time as a pattern emerges instead in a singular event; that way we can distinguish between the random and isolated characteristics of an event that just looks like procrastination and a true procrastinator. On the other hand, screening for procrastination is rather simple and straightforward. All it takes is a test. One quick and almost foolproof test is to task the suspect procrastinator with something that is eminently doable by them in the requested timeframe. This type of test is particularly useful for gauging the procrastination level of an individual with whom you have limited familiarity. The task could be as simple as asking the suspect procrastinator to place a phone call to a third party on your behalf or providing you some information already within their possession. If the task is not promptly done or if it is not followed by other prompt responses, then clear evidence exists of a procrastinator.

Although procrastination can and does occur throughout the project lifecycle its impact may be most noticeable during the implementation stages, just as it was for Bushell during the prisoner escape attempt and just as it was for the Aconcagua mountain climb.

A most effective solution to avoid procrastination is to make as many of the decisions as possible upfront early in the project lifecycle. That way, when the time for implementation comes, little is left to the chance of spontaneous decision-making or procrastination.

One powerful technique for accomplishing this advanced decision-making is through planning. Not only can the tasks and activities be planned, but so too can the decisions. For example, the common practice of holding project reviews can be used not for the decision making itself, but for implementing the already made decisions. Thoroughly planned project reviews, also known as control gates, can follow a script that was developed far earlier in the project lifecycle. These control gates are run according to the entry and exit criteria that are pre-established. If the criteria to hold the review are met, in other words, if the criteria to enter the review are met, then the review is conducted according to plan. Similarly, if the review accomplishes what was defined in the set of exit criteria, in other words, if the review does what was intended, then the project proceeds according to plan. If the entry criteria to hold the review or if the exit criteria when conducting the review are not met, then the project does not proceed according to plan. The use of the pre-established criteria reduces the decision-making burden at the review and consequently reduces the opportunity for procrastination. In effect, the decisions were made long ago during the planning phases. Data Item Descriptions (DIDs) are one technique for capturing in written form the entry and exit criteria for project reviews. These one-page documents can be written for each control gate review as well as for each project deliverable. Measuring progress against the DIDs becomes an exercise in comparison between the defined criteria in the DID with the actual event or document that reduces the opportunity for procrastination.

In project management there seems to be little room for procrastination, and the consequences procrastinating can be quite severe. Fortunately, there are tried and true techniques for recognizing it and for avoiding it. I just hope that not too many project managers procrastinate – and put off dealing with it.

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Don't just tell them.. SHOW them!



Michelle LaBrosse, PMP, is an entrepreneurial powerhouse with a penchant for making success easy, fun and fast. She is the founder of Cheetah Learning, the author of the Cheetah Success Series, and a prolific blogger

whose mission is to bring Project Management to the masses.

I sat in a window seat on the plane with my nose stuck in my newly purchased book. It was one of those books that sucks your right in, leaving you completely unaware of your surrounding, which is exactly what I needed to save me from what otherwise would have been a monotonous travel day, full of weather delays and missed connections. At my next stop, as I waited in an endless line to find out which flight was available for me now that I missed my connection, I was an island of contentment surrounded by a sea of angry and frustrated individuals, and all because I had a good story to occupy me.

I got to thinking about why certain stories were so riveting, why others were just so-so. What I decided was that a good author did not simply tell you the story, they showed you the story as if you were there, revealing the plot with actions of the characters, and not just with explanations. The act of showing, rather than telling, is very powerful, and can turn a story from "boring" to "best seller."

In your profession as a Project Manager, make sure that you are using good story techniques to advance in your occupation by showing others your story, not just telling. Become a captivating author of your career by following these tips.

Walk the Talk

Or better yet, don't talk at all, just walk! A good Project Manager earns the respect of their project team from leading by example. If you want your project team to go the extra mile to accomplish a goal, then be the first to show them how it's done.

I recently worked on a project where team morale was way down due to gossip running amuck among team members. It was worse than a high school prom, and it was affecting project progress.

To snip this attitude in the bud, I changed the script and created a "no whine" bubble around me, where I was not allowed to complain unproductively, and I would not listen to others do it. I showed my project team the appropriate way of communicating by doing so myself, and dealing with unresolved issues by addressing the person involved directly, privately, and in a professional manner. Soon, others followed suite, and team morale began to grow as we built trust and respect within our project team.

The simple act of leading by example changed our project results from what may have been a tragic end, into a success story.

Experiential Learning

Think about the last time you learned a new skill. Did you learn by reading about it, listening to someone else that is proficient in the skill, or by doing it? For most of us, we need our teachers to SHOW us how to perform a task, and then be able to do this task ourselves in a safe environment.

Some of the most innovative private schools in our country are adopting school schedules that provide longer classes. The extra time allows teachers to capitalize on experiential learning that takes place when you give students the time and space to learn the tasks themselves. Do the same for your project team by showing what they need to learn rather than telling them.

Show Your Stuff

Imagine you are sitting in an interview, and you are asked about your best strengths as a PM. You could list off your many attributes, such as your fantastic negotiation and communication skills, OR you could show your skills. Tell your interviewer a story about the time you procured the resources you needed for a project against all odds. While other projects in your organization were running into budget problems, you utilized your negotiation skills and ability to assess others, as well as the situation, arrived at the most optimal situation, saving the project and earning company wide recognition.

The ability to demonstrate your capabilities to others comes handy in an interview, but it is also an essential skill needed throughout your career as a PM. The more specific you are in describing situations and outcomes to show your skills, the clearer your capabilities are, and the more memorable you are.

Show your stuff PM! Because the more you show, the more they know, and the more your career can grow.

JUNE CHAPTER MEETING SPONSOR

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Chapter Meeting – June 14, 2011, 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM

Topic: Agile: Tough Questions Answered

“Agile: Tough Questions Answered”, is an overview of Agile project management methodology and a hard look at some of the concerns about Agile including budget and restructuring.

Synopsis: Oftentimes, “Agile” is used as an umbrella term for new methodology. In this presentation, you will learn about what “Agile” really means in project management—what its strength is, why it is so popular, where and why it is used. This speaker will focus on the mechanics of empirical process control and how it enables a higher degree of management, better long-term planning capabilities, improved team efficiency and improved alignment between results and the business goals of the product. The speaker will also compare the difference of Agile with traditional project management techniques and talk about how to implement of Agile in the workplace.

Featured Speaker – Mark C. Layton, MBA, SCPM, CSM, PMP, Founder, Platinum Edge, Inc

Mark C. Layton is an organizational strategist and PMI certification instructor with over 20 years in the project/program management field. He is the Los Angeles chair for the Agile Project Leadership Network and is the founder of Platinum Edge, Inc. — an organizational improvement company that supports businesses making the Waterfall-to-Agile transition. Prior to founding Platinum Edge in 2001, Mark developed his expertise as a consulting firm executive, program management coach, and in-the-trenches project leader. He also spent 11 years as a Cryptographic Specialist for the US Air Force, where he earned both Commendation and Achievement medals for his accomplishments.

Location

Antun's of Westchester

35 Valley Avenue, Elmsford, NY 10523 | 914-592-5260 | [Get Map](#)

Agenda

5:30 to 6:15	Networking, buffet dinner, Meet the Vendor and Recruiter
6:15 to 6:30	Chapter business / announcements
6:30 to 7:30	Featured program
7:30 to 7:45	Continued networking, meet the Speaker, Vendor, Recruiter
7:45 to 8:45	PMO SIG Meetings (PMO & Quality)

Fees

Chapter members – \$20; Non-members – \$25
 We accept cash or checks. Sorry, no credit cards.

Career Corner – Watch Our Website for Details

Vendor Corner & Meeting Sponsor– Platinum Edge, Inc.

Directions:

From the South:

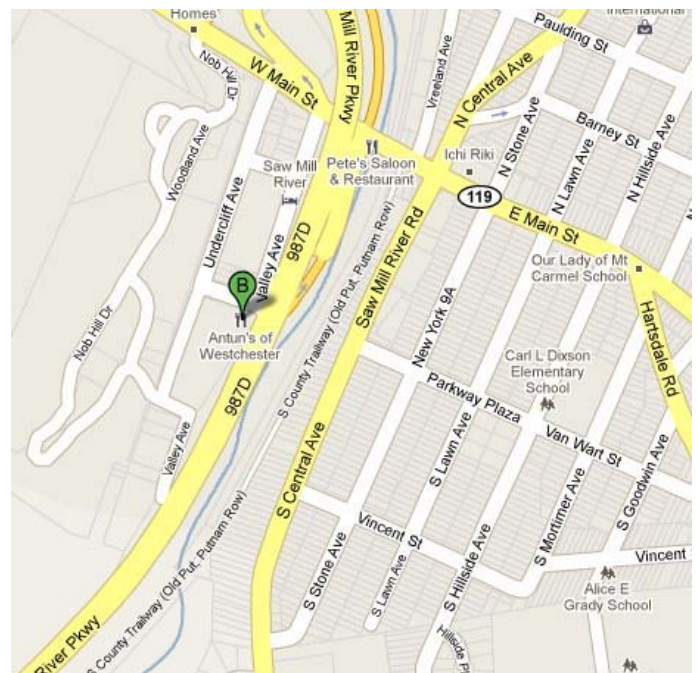
Take the Saw Mill River Parkway North. Get off at the 9A North exit. Turn left onto Route 9A, go under Saw Mill Parkway, and immediately turn left onto W. Main Street / Valley Ave. Pull into parking lot.

OR Take the Bronx River Parkway North to the Sprain Parkway North to I-287 West. Get off at Exit 2 (Elmsford). Turn left at the light onto Saw Mill River Road. Turn Right onto 9A, go under the Saw Mill River Parkway and immediately turn left onto W. Main Street / Valley Ave. Go straight into parking lot of Antun's.

From the North:

Take the Taconic Parkway South to the Saw Mill Parkway. Get off at the 119 East exit. Make a left into parking lot.

Map to Antun's of Westchester



Upcoming PMI Westchester Events

June Breakfast Roundtable Meeting

Topic: PM tools and Techniques

Facilitator: Tom Smith

Date: Thursday, June 16, 2011 – 7:30 to 8:45 AM

Location: 108 Corporate Park Drive, White Plains, NY (off Westchester Ave) Cafeteria – Lobby Level – 2 Buildings down from Malcolm Pirnie

Breakfast available for purchase at the cafeteria



Job Club Events

Support Group for Project Managers who are actively seeking employment. Please check the Job Club's Meetup page for meeting details and directions:

<http://www.meetup.com/Westchester-Project-Managers-Job-Club/>

Topic: TBD

Speaker: Walter Hamill

Date: June 17th

Time: 8:00-10:00 a.m.

Location: Fordham Westchester, 400 Westchester Ave, Room 142, West Harrison, NY 10604

Topic: Alliance Networking

Speaker: Bill Bentley

Date: June 24th

Time: 8:00-10:00 a.m.

Location: Fordham Westchester, 400 Westchester Ave, Room 142, West Harrison, NY 10604

Topic: How to Write a Great Resume and Find the Job You Want

Speaker: Bill Gottlin

Date: July 8th

Time: 8:00-10:00 a.m.

Location: Greenburgh Town Hall, 2nd floor, 177 Hillside Ave, White Plains, NY, 10603

Topic: Make Yourself Memorable at Work, to Your Network, and to Potential Employers

Speaker: Julie Jansen

Date: July 22nd

Time: 8:00-10:00 a.m.

Location: Greenburgh Town Hall, 2nd floor, 177 Hillside Ave, White Plains, NY, 10603

PMP Exam Preparation Study Series

Dates: Mondays, July 11th, 18th, 25th, Aug 1st, 8th, and 15th

Time: 6:30PM to 8:30PM

Instructor: Anita Wilton, PMP

Location: BOCES Center, 44 Executive Drive, Elmsford, NY 10523

Light dinner is provided

Cost: \$300 Westchester Chapter Member, \$375 Non-Chapter Members -- Payment must be made via Pay Pal or by check the first night of class.

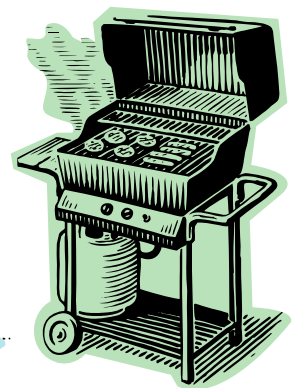
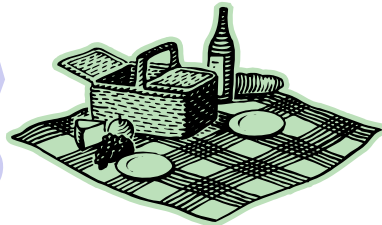
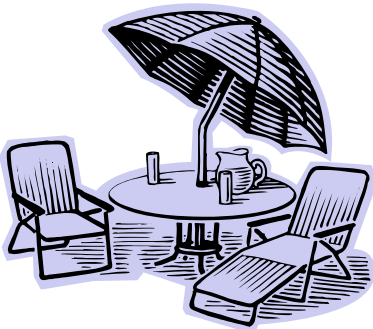
Register online:

<http://www.pmiwestchester.org/pmiprodev.asp>

For more information contact:

education@pmiwestchester.org

Enjoy your summer!



See you in September!!!