

April 2009

## Fighting the Office Rumor Mill During Tough Economic Times



*Jennifer Katus, MBA, PMP, is the owner of Promomento ([www.promomento.com](http://www.promomento.com)), where you'll find incentive and reward gifts for project teams. Jennifer applies her 10+ years of experience as a program manager and consultant to help her clients motivate change, boost morale, stimulate momentum, and celebrate success.*

It's no secret that the office rumor mill goes into hyperdrive when an economic downturn fuels fears of cutbacks, restructurings, and layoffs. As a manager you need to maintain momentum and ensure team performance despite the distraction of rumors. Your best bet is to get ahead of the rumors. Take control with an informed perspective. Use a proactive approach to address current rumors and prevent future ones. So LEAP to it!

**Learn.** Step up your rumor patrol. Regularly ask your team what they have heard. Depending on the tone of your current situation and the openness of your team, you may want to collect information from individuals or small groups rather than your whole team at a meeting. Solicit rumor leads from your peers as well. Rumors have a way of spreading quickly between groups. Likewise, if you learn of a rumor that affects a group other than your own, tactfully let the manager of the group know.

**Evaluate.** Get underneath the rumor to really understand what fears and concerns it is generating. Also evaluate how far it has spread. All rumors matter, but some are more poisonous than others. The more dangerous the rumor, the faster you need to deal with it. Also keep a look out for anyone who seems to generate rumors for sport. These folks, although rare, are best dealt with in a closed door setting. A public acknowledgment of their rumors can fuel their fire.

**Address.** Use simple, direct language to address any rumor. Restate the rumor and label it a myth. Correct the rumor with fact. For an example of excellent rumor control, check out [www.fightthesmears.com](http://www.fightthesmears.com). It's best to correct rumors in a public setting with your whole team present. This approach prevents your correction from being distorted into another layer of rumor. It enables everyone to ask clarifying questions and allows everyone to hear the same response.

Avoid using an emergency meeting or an urgent email to correct a rumor.

This kind of drama gratifies a rumor and can inspire more conversation about it, rather than less. Once the rumor is corrected, give the rumor closure by moving on to other more important topics

**Prevent.** Solicit your team in your quest to spread the truth by asking them to correct the rumor if it resurfaces. Ask them to notify you of any new rumors, so you can find out the truth and share it with them. Also ask your boss to keep you informed of any changes that could become fodder for rumors if they are not communicated properly.



Rumors are more prevalent in environments where interpersonal competition is stiff. You can create an environment that is less hospitable to rumors by fostering rapport as a means to reward. Make sure you acknowledge teamwork as well as solitary achievements.

Rumors, like office politics, can never be totally eliminated. However, with a sound rumor control method and a proactive approach, you can mitigate the risks that rumors introduce.

### "The Critical Path" Inside this Month's Issue

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# Letter from the President



## Remembrance

If you were at our February 10<sup>th</sup>, chapter meeting, you'll recall that I was not there. That morning I received a call that father was losing his brief struggle with acute leukemia and that I needed to get to Boston as quickly as possible to be with him and my family as he passed on.

My dad, George B. Bailey, was a tremendously dynamic man – and was remembered with a large obituary in the Boston Globe as a community activist. For over 50 years, he was active in town government as well as the regional agencies for mass transit and community planning. At the time he died, he was actively serving on five town committees and the outpouring of support and sorrow from the larger community was almost overwhelming. In the course of a series of memorial gatherings and services, many stories were exchanged about my Dad and his wide ranging interests, enthusiasms and the many, many causes he championed and organizations he started.

At age 21, he had discovered the joys of sailing, obtained an old sailboat, gathered some friends and formed the local sailing club, before heading back to college. Today the “Yacht Club” is a thriving institution, with a long waiting list. Later, he championed rail transit over the construction of super-highways – and built a regional coalition that resulted in the cancellation of several major highway projects in favor of mass transit. He was also one of the first adults to discover the joys of bicycling and once again, what's now Boston's largest bicycle club was founded in our barn.

The list could go on and on. My Dad was a visionary – one who could see the greater possibilities from what others saw as minor and mundane. He was also a leader – he could arouse passions in others and get them to share in his vision. But most important, my Dad knew his limits – he never sought to be Commodore of the Yacht Club, President of the Bike Club nor take on a full time role in administering transportation or planning policies. He knew that the endurance of his contributions depended on his finding others to step up, manage the details and move things forward. In doing so, he ensured that the many great things he started will continue now that he is no longer with us.

Growing up, I did not always see it this way. His fast changing enthusiasms, as well as his passion for community service seem to leave a lot of half finished household projects and half baked plans. There were times I resented being left to finish up something that wasn't really my idea in the first place – and my interest in project management might even be a reaction to that. Likewise, while I was proud of how he championed noble, but unpopular causes, I was taken aback at how much he seemed to be a part of the very “establishment” that were perpetrating policies at odds with his principles.

But looking back at what he did accomplish I see things differently. My Dad could never have started all these great things if he saddled himself with finishing them as well. His special talent was his ability to get others to apply their native talents planning, executing and operating what he envisioned. Likewise, as part of the “establishment” he was able to build gradual acceptance for his views – building on common interests – understanding how to answer the eternal question of “What's in it for me” without ultimately compromising his objective.

*(Letter from the President continued on page 5)*

## PMI Westchester Board of Directors

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## Better Safe Than Sorry?



**A Risk Doctor Briefing Note**  
© 2009 Dr David Hillson PMP FAPM  
[david@risk-doctor.com](mailto:david@risk-doctor.com)

Whenever we face a risk, one of the biggest challenges is deciding what to do about it, if anything. There is a popular saying in English, which says ***“It is better to be safe than to be sorry.”*** This proverb has affected a wide range of areas, including government policy, health and safety legislation, environmental standards, business regulatory frameworks, child protection practice, and even parenting guidelines. In these contexts it is better known as ***the precautionary principle***.

The precautionary principle states that in any situation where there is a threat of severe or irreversible harm, and if there is no positive proof that harm would not result, then we should take protective action. Decisions are then made to protect the public or the environment from the severe harm that might occur. Examples include reactions to the supposed but unproven “dangers” of genetically-modified food, mobile phones or nanotechnology. There are also many cases of unnecessary rules and regulations being introduced to protect people from a wide range of “everyday hazards”.

The problem with the precautionary principle is that it leads to an over-protective approach, wasting too much time and effort on things that might not ever be a problem. This arises from a focus on one of the two main dimensions of risk and ignoring the other. The precautionary principle concentrates on impact (what would happen if the risk occurred) but tends to ignore probability (how likely the risk is to occur at all). This is partly because the impact of a risk is easy to estimate or describe, whereas probability is a hard concept, especially where we have no relevant previous experience of a this or a similar risk. We also discount probability because people generally are afraid of statistics.

How does the precautionary principle relate to the worlds of projects and business? We constantly encounter risks in all our projects and enterprises, and many of these risks are novel with no previous history or track record to guide us in how to respond. As in public life, the temptation is for management teams to exercise caution, preferring safety “just in case”, leading to an unnecessary overreaction to risks and a waste of valuable time and resources that could be better used elsewhere. Then when nothing happens and the risks which we all worried about never materialise, people say that risk management is just a lot of fuss about nothing.

In the UK the value of the precautionary principle is being challenged. A recent government enquiry even recommended that it should be dropped because it exerts an unhelpful influence over public policy, even though European law requires governments to take it into account when forming policy.

On our projects too, we should question whether “better safe than sorry” is the right approach. A few simple steps can help us to counter the tendency to be over-protective. For example we should ensure that our risk process

includes a realistic assessment of how likely a risk is to occur, as well as an estimate of its possible effect. We need to recognise that the worst case level of impact almost never happens, and perhaps it would be better to develop responses which target the most likely impact. We must remember that some risks are good for us, and positive opportunities should be identified and pursued. We need to get used to ideas of “risk efficiency”,

balancing risk and reward, and accept that it is appropriate and necessary to take some risks. And finally we must improve our risk communication, being clear about exactly what risks we face, how likely they are to happen, what levels of impact could realistically result, and what responses are appropriate.

“Better safe than sorry” sounds like a good attitude to adopt, in life as well as in our projects and business. But it is possible to be too safe, being overprotective and cautious, preventing ourselves from taking the risks that are associated with progress, innovation and success. Let’s banish the precautionary principle from our projects, and use the risk process to ensure that we stay as safe as possible and have no reason to be sorry.

To provide feedback on this Briefing Note, or for more details on how to develop effective risk management, [contact the Risk Doctor \(info@risk-doctor.com\)](mailto:info@risk-doctor.com), or [visit the Risk Doctor website \(www.risk-doctor.com\)](http://www.risk-doctor.com).



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## Letter from the Scheduler



*Ed Mahler, PMP, President Project Administration Institute founded the Institute in 1992. Mr. Mahler is a PMI certified PMP since 1993 and founder and president of the Westchester NY Chapter of PMI from August 2002 to June 2008. You can contact Ed at 917-734-3953.*

### Politics

In our March issue we discussed the difference between companies that derive their revenue from their products or services (like manufacturers, distributors, or service providers) and companies that do projects for a living (like construction, engineering, or defense). We also pointed out that few of our PMI brethren are from the projects-for-a-living category. We PMI members are mostly from the products-and-services industries and are dealing with a management team that is not disciplined by a market place that punishes those who can't fulfill project commitments. And they rarely fire unresponsive participants.

PMI project managers dangle in a political force field that defies us to be successful. We have executives that don't understand project management, matrix organizations that don't support projects well, and participants that don't work for us and have other priorities besides our project. Contrast that with the projects-for-a-living environment where participants report to the project manager or a project executive, executives rose through the ranks running projects and understand what your doing, and the entire organization takes what your doing very seriously or their out of business.

The ultimate challenge for the project manager in a products-and-services environment is the IT software project. IT software is the only class of project whose product doesn't have to obey the laws of physics. A program is an intellectual construct and anything can happen inside it. You may exhaustively design and test a program system and still not catch a defect until its installed and hundreds of people are using it. It's also the class of project whose product specs are likely to change the most times during the project. It's the ultimate project management and change management challenge and thus even more important to implement strategies that emulate the projects-for-a-living environment.

### Emulating the projects-for-a-living project environment

What can we project managers do to emulate the forces that make projects-for-a-living project managers successful? The answer is leverage.

1. Identify the lowest level executive high up enough in the organization such that all your participants and their managers report to him/her and that person's career will be positively or negatively impacted by the success or failure of your project. If you can't engage this individual you are left to rely only on your personal influence and are at risk of becoming the scapegoat in a failure scenario.

2. Establish the contract. Every projects-for-a-living project has one. It documents the agreement between the project team and the client. It specifies what is in and out of scope, the detailed schedule with participant tasks, and the budget.
3. Distribute the contract to the executive, the team, and stakeholders for agreement or adjustment. When no further adjustments are requested this is your contract. The executive and stakeholders know what to expect, and participants have agreed to their schedule of tasks.
4. Produce a high-level periodic status report that is distributed to participants, stakeholders, and the executive. It should include a summary page that will catch the executive's eye if there is something you need fixed.

### What should be in the 1 page high-level project status report?

1. Not red, yellow, and green flags. Not what percent complete the project is. Not earned value metrics. Instead:
2. Changes from contract and from last update - Key milestone date slippage and why, budget overrun and why, what is being done to recover, and what assistance is required if any from higher levels in the organization.
3. Risk of further scope, schedule, or budget slippage if any.
4. Under the cover page the detailed schedule (the status report) showing changes to task durations and finish date and the names of the owners of those tasks should anyone care to drill down.
5. A second schedule showing the to do's (tasks that should be underway or complete) for the next status update.

### This has 3 benefits:

1. Managers of participants will want to avoid appearing responsible for slippage and therefore ensure that their people stay on schedule.
2. Even if the executive doesn't ask questions managers will be concerned that they may be questioned.
3. No one can claim lack of information, you are covered.

Properly implemented the executive leveraging technique will give you control of your project comparable to that of a projects-for-a-living project manager. But it cannot be done without a professional detailed project schedule that tracks progress and slippage and informs participants of upcoming to do's. The schedule is the representation of the contract details. It describes when the project will accomplish the scope and budget.

### Next

Next month we'll talk about what else the schedule does for the PM and the fastest most cost effective way to create a professional schedule.

# Seven Fallacies That Delay Project Management Maturity



Harold Kerzner (Ph.D.; MS, Engineering; MBA) is Senior Executive Director with International Institute for Learning, Inc., and Professor of Systems Management at Baldwin-Wallace College. He is an expert in the areas of project management, total quality management, and strategic planning.

All too often, companies embark upon a journey to implement project management only to discover that the path they thought was clear and straightforward is actually filled with obstacles and fallacies. Without sufficient understanding of the looming roadblocks and how to overcome them, an organization may never reach a high level of project management maturity. Their competitors, on the other hand, may require only a few years to implement an organization-wide strategy that predictably and consistently delivers successful projects.

One key obstacle to project management maturity is that implementation activities are often spearheaded by people in positions of authority within an organization. These people often have a poor understanding of project management, yet are unwilling to attend training programs, even short ones, to capture a basic understanding of what is required to successfully bring project management implementation to maturity. A second key obstacle is that these same people often make implementation decisions based upon personal interests or hidden agendas. Both obstacles cause project management implementation to suffer.

The fallacies affecting the maturity of a project management implementation do not necessarily prevent project management from occurring. Instead, these mistaken beliefs elongate the implementation time frame and create significant frustration in the project management ranks. The seven most common fallacies are explained below.

**Fallacy 1: Our ultimate goal is to implement project management.** -- Wrong goal! The ultimate goal must be the development of project management systems and processes that consistently and predictably result in a continuous stream of successful projects.

**Fallacy 2: We need to establish a mandatory number of forms, templates, guidelines, and checklists by a certain point in time.** -- Wrong criteria! Project management maturity can be evaluated only by establishing time-based levels of maturity and by using assessment instruments for measurement.

**Fallacy 3: We need to purchase project management software to accelerate the maturity process** -- Wrong approach! Purchasing software just for the sake of having project management software is a bad idea.

**Fallacy 4: We need to implement project management in small steps with a small breakthrough project that everyone can track.** -- Wrong method! This works if time is not a constraint. The best bet is to use a large project as the breakthrough project.

**Fallacy 5: We need to track and broadcast the results of the breakthrough project.** -- Wrong course of action! Expounding a project's successful results benefits only that project. Illuminating how project management caused a project to succeed benefits the entire organization. People then understand that project management can be used successfully on a multitude of projects.

**Fallacy 6: We need executive support.** -- Almost true! We need visible executive support. People can easily differentiate between genuine support and lip service. Executives must walk the talk.

**Fallacy 7: We need a project management course so our workers can become Project Management Professionals (PMPs).** -- Once again, almost true! What we really need is lifelong education in project management. Becoming a PMP is just the starting point. There is life beyond the PMBOK® Guide.

Needless to say, significantly more fallacies than discussed in this paper are out there, waiting to block your project management implementation and delay its maturity.

You can read Dr. Kerzner's article in its completion at [AIIPM.com](http://AIIPM.com)

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## Letter from the President (con't)

We can these principles to the projects and programs that we manage. Having a project charter and a budget does not give us a carte blanche to reach our objectives in what we think is the most expeditious way – we have to understand and build our relations with our projects' stakeholders – and keep their interests in mind as we proceed. Once we start, we should recognize that the process of initiating, planning executing and closing a project involves a wide range of skills and aptitudes. No one person can possibly excel at all of these. When we form our project teams, we need to find people with the right aptitudes and temperament for each part of the effort – and possibly consider changing leadership when the nature of the project changes as well. Most importantly though, we need to know ourselves – and know where we make our best contributions and what we need from others to complement our abilities.

See you at the April chapter meeting.

Duff Bailey, PMP  
President  
PMI Westchester

# Who's Shaking Your Snow Globe?



Michelle LaBrosse, PMP, is the founder of Cheetah Learning, and author of *Cheetah Negotiation* and *Cheetah Project Management*. The Project Management Institute, [www.pmi.org](http://www.pmi.org), recently selected Michelle as one of the 25 Most Influential Women in Project Management in the World.

*Influential Women in Project Management in the World.*

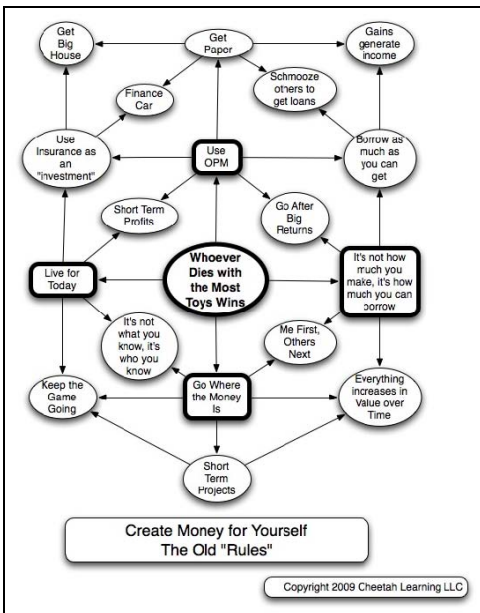
When I think about what's happening in the world right now, it reminds me of those snow globes that I had as a kid. The world is calm and serene in the little village until someone shakes the snow globe, and then in an instant the world changes.

There are two ways to handle change. One way is to keep doing what you were doing and ignore the change that is happening. The other way is to forget about the old way of doing things, embrace the snow and set up some new rules for your wintry world.

On the following pages, let's take a look at some of the old rules that have defined many of us over the last decade, and new rules that can bring us forward. Then, we'll look at our role as Project Managers in creating value in any environment -- serene or shaken.

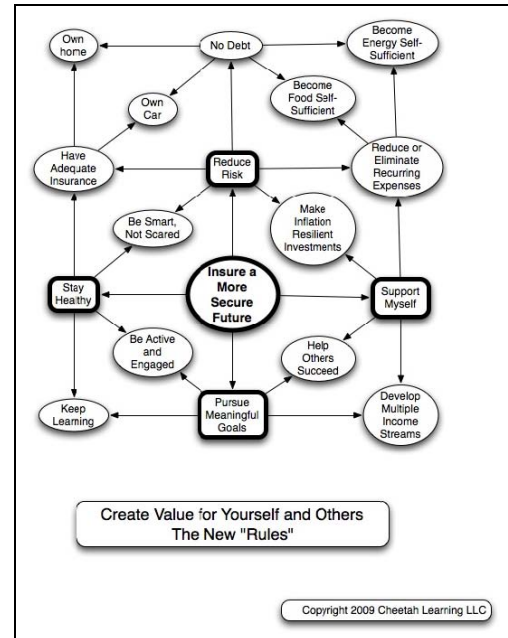
## Old Rules

The old rules focused on getting ahead with "OPM" -- other people's money, and winning was defined by "stuff." Whoever has most toys wins. Like a Ponzi scheme, this is a short-term game that doesn't build long-term value or happiness.



## New Rules

I'd like to propose some new rules that will let us all move forward, begin thinking in new ways and create value for ourselves and those around us.



## Super Hero or Just a Good Project Manager?

When the snow globe has been shaken, who are the most valuable people to have on your team? It's people who know how to get things done, talk the frantic folks down out of the tree and get the team moving again on a new terrain. Sound familiar? That person is probably you. While you may not wear a leotard into work with a big PM on your chest, people will see you as a Super Hero if you can bring some of the new rules into being.

Ask yourself these questions:

1. How can I create more value for other people, **FAST**?
2. How can I reduce or eliminate risks (including cost overruns) on my projects?
3. How can I better leverage my skills to create more value for others?
4. How can I find the opportunities that are best for me?
5. Are the goals and commitments I had in the past right for me now?
6. How can I help people on my team and in my family become more successful?
7. How can I be healthier, so I'm operating at my best?
8. How can I be the project manager and team member who succeeds while helping others to succeed?

Answer these questions and ease on the down the road with your new set of rules. Then, when the world gets shaken, you're ready to go.



## Chapter Meeting – April 14, 2009, 5:30 to 7:30 pm

### Topic: “A formula for “Outsourcing.”

Many companies run into trouble when they shift work offshore, but they usually persist since this process is critical to corporate success. This presentation explores this ever growing trend and will help the audience avoid the common pitfalls when outsourcing. A proven formula for project success will be outlined during the discussion.

**Featured Speaker - Mark Hehl**, is president of Hehl & Associates.

His efforts have helped companies successfully set up and improve operations in various countries including India, China, The Philippines and Latin America. These projects have resulted in significant reductions in operating costs along with improved service and quality. Mr. Hehl holds a BS Degree in Electrical Engineering from the New York Institute of Technology and a MS Degree in Management from the Polytechnic Institute of New York. Mark was a Delegate and featured presenter at the Third China-American Quality Symposium held in Shanghai, China and at the 2007 PMI North American Congress held in Atlanta. Mark is listed in the United Who’s Who Executive Directory.

### Location

#### Casaletto’s Fine Italian Cuisine

15 Saw Mill River Road, Elmsford, NY  
914-592-5980 | [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, buffet dinner, 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.

### Vendor Corner

#### MANAGEMENTCONCEPTS

Hosted by Dawn Gerber  
8230 Leesburg Pike, Vienna, VA 22182,  
Office: 703-270-4035, Cell: 202-361-9338,  
<http://www.managementconcepts.com>

### Career Corner

Vertical Resources, Inc.

Hosted by Marisa M. Vespoli, Recruiter/Sales  
1160 Parsippany Blvd., Suite 202, Parsippany, NJ 07054  
Office: 973-541-9200 ext 15 Cell: 201-697-3856  
[marisa@verticalresources.com](mailto:marisa@verticalresources.com),  
[www.verticalresources.com](http://www.verticalresources.com),

### Directions:

#### From White Plains:

From Central Avenue in Hartsdale, take Hartsdale Avenue West for 2.2 miles. Turn left onto Route 119, and follow for one mile. Turn left onto Saw Mill River Road, and go .1 mile.

#### From the South:

Take the Saw Mill River Parkway North. Get off at the Elmsford exit, and turn right at the Stop sign. Turn right at the first light onto Saw Mill River Road. The restaurant is on the right.

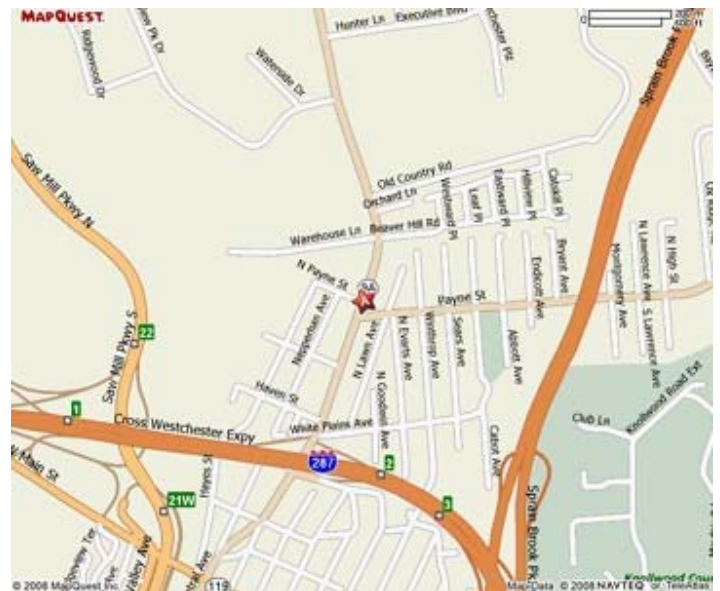
**OR** Take the Bronx River Parkway North to the Sprain Parkway North to I-287 West. Get off at Exit 2 (Elmsford). Turn left at the light onto Saw Mill River Road. Go straight through the intersection. The restaurant is on the right.

#### From the North:

Take the Taconic Parkway South to the Saw Mill Parkway. Get off at the Elmsford exit. Go around the bend, and turn right at the Stop sign. Turn right at the first light onto Saw Mill River Road. The restaurant will be on the right.

Valet parking is available in the front. Additional parking is on the street or in the Post Office parking lot across the street from the restaurant.

### Map to Casaletto’s Fine Italian Cuisine



## Upcoming PMI Westchester Events

### April Breakfast Roundtable Meeting

**Topic:** "Budgets and Pivots"

**Special Guest Facilitator:** Donna Crefeld-Sinicola

**Date:** Thursday, Apr 16<sup>th</sup> – 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**

### May Chapter Meeting

**Topic:** Risk Management: Essential in Today's Economy

**Speakers:** **Dr. Sanford Liebesman**, Ph.D., ASQ Fellow

**Date:** May 12, 2009

**Location:** Casaletto's Fine Italian Restaurant, Elmsford, NY

### Local PM Education



**Topic:** **SNEC PM Conference 2009 -- "The Passion and Power of Project Management™"** -- Exciting and Invigorating, this is our fourth annual all day Professional Development Day

filled with Inspiring speakers, Dynamic Breakout Sessions, Knowledgeable Sponsors, Great Networking Opportunities and Delicious Food at an Elegant Venue! Ask someone who went last year about how great it was, and we guarantee this year will be even better! Keynote speakers this year are Toni Newman and Noah Blumenthal. This is an event with value you won't want to miss! PMP's can earn up to 7.00 PDU

**Location:** Connecticut Convention Center, Hartford CT -- Sponsored by the Southern New England Chapter -

**Westchester PMI members get SNEC member rate**

**Date:** Friday, May 1, 2009

**Time:** 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM

**Register at** [Southern New England Chapter](#)

**Topic:** **Outside the Box Project Management PMI/NJ Regional Symposium -- "Creativity for Project Managers"**

**Speaker:** Dr. Oliver Schlake

**Location:** Pines Manor, Edison NJ -- Sponsored by the New Jersey Chapter – **Westchester PMI members get NJ Chapter member rate**

**Date:** Sunday, May 3, 2009

**Time:** 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM

**Register at** [New Jersey Chapter](#)

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## The Critical Path

The Critical Path is PMI Westchester's free monthly newsletter, published as a service for members and non-members alike. We're always looking for your contributions. To submit an article for publication, please contact any of the newsletter editors listed below:

Brenda Horton – Newsletter Editor  
[newsletter@pmiwestchester.org](mailto:newsletter@pmiwestchester.org)

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