

Project Manager Interview

Responses from a Program Manager, Lockheed Martin-Maritime Systems and Sensors.

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1. How did you get into project management?
I got into project management after a long stint as a project lead. After one of the project managers left for another department, I applied and got the position.
2. Did you have any training or special talents or experiences that qualified you for the job?
I took a project management seminar through our company learning center. Other than that I believe it's a combination of my previous work experience and my ability to manage multiple tasks.
3. Are you certified or have you thought about becoming certified as a PMP?
I am not currently certified but plan to be in the future.
4. What do you feel is the most important thing you do as a project manager? On what task do you spend the most time each day?
The most important thing is to have a clear scope that you are able to communicate to the team. The team has to be in agreement with your vision of the project schedule and cost. Once the team is in unison then they can be effective team members. Most of the day I spend is keeping track of the project's schedule and cost. I also spend most of the day resolving issues that is hampering the schedule progress. I also spend a fair amount of time with upper management and customers communicating the status of the projects progress.
5. What are some of the challenges that you face on a daily basis?
Most of my challenges are trying to keep the individual tasks on track so they will not affect overall project schedule. Some times things like getting things through the company's bureaucracy of getting things ordered or getting the right software licenses. Other things include keeping the team members motivated and happy.
6. Please describe any notable successes and failures you've had on projects. What did you learn from those experiences?
I was in charge of launching new product line w/requirements that were constantly changing, at the same time the schedule date was not allowed to slip. Project sponsor (My manager) kept promising the customer new requirements that weren't on the original specification. Needless to say the product was delayed and in poor quality because of the strain to meet the project schedule. That was not a good experience and I left that department shortly after that.
7. What are some of the tools, software or otherwise, that you use, and what is your opinion of those tools?
I mainly use Microsoft Project for a lot of the project planning and tracking activities. For the most part I find it is a good tool to use. It allows you to have a nice way of tracking schedule. I know in the last few revisions they have added new features and improved it greatly.
8. What do you enjoy most and what do you like least about being a project manager?
I enjoy being the person responsible for the project progress and ultimately its success. I also enjoy doing work outside the engineering scope across multiple functional teams and departments. What I don't like about is dealing with difficult personalities.

9. What are some steps a project manager can take to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of a team?
The team members need to be on the same page as the project manager when it comes to the solutions and methods used to arrive at them. Another thing I have seen is that teams don't do so well when they are micromanaged by the project manager. Team members need to be able to use their own problem solving skills and creativity during the project. If they are not challenged; productivity can suffer.
10. How does a new project manager gain the respect and loyalty of team members? Can you share any examples of situations you faced related to this topic?
To get the respect of your team members a project manager should allow team members to take ownership of specific tasks and solutions. Another way to get the respect of team members is to be truthful and honest and to do business with complete integrity.
11. What suggestions do you have for working with sponsors and senior managers? Can you share any examples of situations you faced related to this topic?
You must communicate regularly and avoid going into too much detail. They just want to know if the project is meeting scope, cost, and schedule. Also be honest with the sponsors and senior managers, if things are going bad they want to know about them, they hate surprises.
12. Do you have any suggestions for future project managers, such as any specific preparations they should make, skills they should learn, etc?
Future Project Managers should take formal training and have excellent communication skills; most companies have formal project manager seminars available. The best way to learn is to get experience with small projects and take on bigger and more complex projects as you get more experience.