



What Makes An Effective Project Manager?

One of the best ways to avoid project claims is to hire and/or train the most effective project managers you can.

Perhaps no other employee has as much potential to impact project quality, client satisfaction and the overall success of your firm as the project manager. That same project manager's performance can also become a flashpoint for claims. Research conducted by the Design Professional group of the XL



Insurance companies shows that project team capability issues are a contributing factor in almost one quarter of the claims and loss prevention file count (and 21% of the claims and loss prevention file dollars). Of those, fully 34% are attributed to the work of unqualified or inexperienced project managers.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

It takes a lot more than technical competence to become a good project manager. To be really effective, a PM needs the administrative, organizational and interpersonal skills necessary to communicate and manage the myriad disparate facets of a design project, including identifying and solving problems.

According to research conducted by Design Professional, an effective project manager,

- **Satisfies and exceeds client needs.** The effective project manager understands that quality begins with the client, that it is defined by the client's needs and expectations. The PM will go the extra mile to meet and exceed those benchmarks.

- **Understands the process** of getting the job done on time and within budget (and conveys this to the team). The PM's appetite for the details of process, scheduling, accounting and documentation gets the job done.
- **Realizes that profit isn't a dirty word.** This PM understands that the design business is a business, and that despite the technical or design components of the project, the firm must make money.
- **Coordinates interrelated tasks.** The effective project manager has an aptitude for the complicated and interdependent aspects of design and engineering.
- **Communicates well.** The PM is constantly in contact with the client and project team members, staying on top of everyone's needs, progress and potential problems. He or she has excellent verbal and written skills.
- **Leads.** A successful project manager inspires others to achieve true design quality and gives team members the training and resources they need to succeed.
- **Has a vision** and lays out this vision to others in manageable parts. This project manager begins with a clear understanding of the project objective and communicates it to the team. As a result, each team member operates with an awareness of his or her role in fulfilling that vision.
- **Provides guidance and adequate controls to team members.** The PM carefully defines each team member's role and responsibilities, keeping in mind the larger mission as well as the level of detail team members need to accomplish their tasks. The PM establishes multiple, achievable milestones and clear expectations.
- **Leads by example.** An effective PM exhibits character, integrity, competence and excitement about the project. This type of leader builds loyalty

and encourages top performance by giving team members latitude to perform their jobs.

- **Anticipates problems.** Since problems will arise on a project, a PM's biggest asset is the ability to anticipate and respond to these problems.
- **Identifies dispute situations** and seeks the assistance of management or legal counsel for dispute resolution. The effective project manager knows the signs of a project in trouble and understands where and when to go for help.
- **Looks for alternatives** and options at times of conflict. This PM continually seeks creative solutions to problems until the situation is resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

TEAM CULTURE

Finally, one of the most important roles of the successful project manager is to transform a group of talented people into a focused and cohesive team. He or she achieves this by giving and encouraging continuous feedback and communication and by praising successes and celebrating project milestones. It's not as warm and fuzzy as it sounds; there's a real bottom-line payoff. Teams who enjoy their work are more effective in meeting challenges.

Adapted from the new workshop from the Design Professional group of the XL Insurance companies, "Project Team Capabilities: Building a Team for Success.". For information about this and other loss prevention education programs we offer, contact your agent or broker.

The information in this article is the product of over 30 years of front-line claims experience and is part of the educational service provided to the design industry by the Design Professional group of the XL Insurance companies. For more information, other loss prevention resources and to find an agent in your area, visit xldp.com or phone 800-227-8533 ext.2102508.

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