

Extreme Project Management: 10 Tips to Accelerate Your Tech Project

By Lee Pearson
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Managing a critical Web, IT or software development project can be like navigating an obstacle course. Inefficient processes, miscommunication and ineffective management threaten to slow your progress at every turn. One missed deadline can throw everything off and result in an unhappy customer or even worse—failure.

How quickly and efficiently you complete a project can be just as important as how well you execute it. With a few easy adjustments, you can immediately accelerate productivity and reduce the risk involved in your next tech project. Follow these easy Extreme Project Management tips to save time and money, helping your entire team move smoothly and steadily toward the finish line.

Tip 1 Show, don't tell

I've learned that the sooner you can visually express your end products to your team and your customers, the better. Whether you use flow charts, diagrams, topologies, schematics, wireframes or even comps, visual representations will always accomplish more in less time than a document full of technology specifications. While delivering a project for a Fortune 100 company, I was tasked with defining and specifying the upgrade of an ecommerce storefront. I wrote detailed requirement documents that tied seamlessly to wireframes and schematics. The package was spot-on! I proudly delivered the complete package to my buyer, who flipped through it and said, "I believe this is right but I can't visualize it. Show me pictures." With that feedback, I brought in my designer and quickly developed beautiful mock-ups of the flow.

The buyer was delighted and passed the mock-ups to other executives and engineers. Cross-functional team conversations drove and accelerated the development phase, with the mock-ups as the central focus. We even brought customers in to review the mock-ups, and we immediately integrated their feedback.

Tip 2 Meet less, do more

Besides email management, meetings are a company's biggest time waster. Too often, a

team wastes valuable cycles in meetings that are mismanaged, without an agenda or a facilitator to keep things moving. Force your team to tighten up by cutting the total number of meetings by 75%. I advise using a template in meeting software that forces the organizer to appoint a facilitator and create an agenda. Setup a dashboard report of your team's meetings to quickly get a sense of volume, frequency and content.

Tip 3 Get your team out in the open

When IBM needed to quickly get their first PC to market, they formed a team and moved all members into the same work space. That move immediately accelerated their time to market. To promote real-time communications, I recommend moving cross functional teams into the same space and removing cubes and walls to create an open work space.

Tip 4 Say it, don't send it

Too much time is spent every day managing email. As I mentioned in Tip 2, personal and business email management is a company's biggest time waster. Cut inter-team emails by 90% by encouraging people to cross communicate within a group setting or walk around to talk to teammates rather than create long email threads about a subject.

Tip 5 Reward success

Besides ESPP and MBO programs, i.e. money, food is a fantastic reward for your team. Order pizza or send someone out on a coffee run to naturally pull folks together and also keep people on site!

Tip 6 Estimate wisely, and hold your team accountable

An unrealistic delivery estimate sets the stage for missed deadlines and late completion. Work with team members to shore up task estimation. Have other team members help to set the estimates and hold everyone accountable for sticking to them. A team member who consistently misses deadlines should be let go. End of story.

Tip 7 Use tools to track everything

Stay on top of tasks, dependencies and accountability issues by using a tracking tool to make your life easier and eliminate busy work for your project managers. MSProject is perfect for managing and delivering projects that need to move. Excel is not the tool for the job!

Tip 8 Empower by delegating

Your personal "to-stop" list -a list of items you need to stop doing- should be filled with implementation tasks that can easily be handed off to your team. Tasks should trickle downward. Keep everyone's plate full.

Tip 9 Revisit and streamline your process

Your project managers should be meeting on a quarterly basis to discuss what has worked for them, what has failed, what they would like to learn and what new processes they could apply. One single process does not fit all organizational needs. Using different processes for various types and sizes of projects should be the norm. Don't be afraid to experiment and try new processes. Read up on some of the well-documented processes on the market, insert them as appropriate, closely monitor results, and apply what you've learned across all your projects.

Tip 10 Get customer feedback early and often

As I wrote in Tip 1, visual representations help accelerate project velocity. There is no better way to prove that than to get those representations in front of customers early and often. Encouraging customer feedback is the only way you can be confident that your solution will satisfy their needs. ■

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