

Reporting straight from the jobsite, the author relates lessons learned during his career that help keep projects on track.

PROBLEMS, ISSUES, DELAYS, DEADLINES... things that make your project not to go as planned. This is what I am writing about in this installment of my column, since I am on a project site dealing with all of the approve. The last four days working a load-out of wind towers as the project manager have been hectic, and I wanted to catch my impressions while still on the site and share some of the lessons to be learned.

Planning is everything, except when it isn't. Making plans and preparations are important, but being able to adjust and have contingency plans in place is critical. Project cargo is rarely linear in execution. Planning is an absolute must, and this captures 80-90 percent of what needs to be done onsite. It is the 10-20 percent that is unknown that can kill a job. On this particular project I am glad that I had resources lined up just in case something needed to be repaired. One phone call, and I had the issue corrected without loss of time—that's the benefit of planning for things to go wrong.

Keep things moving on a site. Stay ahead of the cargo, and do not let things delay loading. This is the mantra of the project manager, who always needs to be three steps ahead of the action. Let the crews do the immediate work; you need to plan the next steps ahead to keep things moving. Delays equal money, so avoid them at all costs.

Have a mindset to multitask, and delegate as much as possible to allow yourself to solve problems. Many things can happen at once, so understand the difference between "urgent" and "important," because just because something is urgent doesn't mean it's important. Do what is important first. Important things add value, urgent things just keep you busy. Of course, deal with the urgent important things first!

Have staff to back you up. Just because you're onsite doesn't stop e-mails or phone calls from coming in. Have someone who can handle those for you. In our company we always have one senior project manager stay in the office at all times to offer support to field operations. Having an experienced person to cover for you is essential to solving problems and handling critical communications. I cannot count the number of times when that person back in the office was experienced enough to handle a tough problem and take it off of my own plate.

Keep a notebook with you at all times, because this is your log of what is happening. Have key numbers to

call for assistance listed there, and have key measurements and data at your fingertips. This will keep things moving. Think of it as an extension of your brain. To paraphrase what Albert Einstein once said: "I do not need to know my phone number, I only need to know where to find it."

Projects are difficult, and problems will always arise. Understand that problems will present themselves, and that you are there to solve them. Understand this up front, and it really does make a difference. The best project managers embrace this approach and remain calm during difficulties, knowing that sense of calm

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reflects on the people working alongside them. One lesson I learned a long time ago is that true character is revealed during stressful times. Under difficult situations remain calm, let the people do their jobs, and resist micromanaging. I see it all the time: managers flying off the handle, ranting at people and thinking such behavior will somehow improve the situation—it doesn't. Keep a sense of humor about you, and remember that things are rarely as bad as they first appear.

Which leaves me to my last lesson before I have to get back to work: Leave your ego at home, and recognize that everyone can contribute. Listen to the people doing the work since they often have the best ideas. Encourage them to speak out, and give them credit. More good ideas come from the people doing the actual work than you may realize. I have been fortunate to learn more from them than they have from me. ✨

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