



# Project Management: Opportunity Lost?

Project Management --- it's where the rubber meets the road. It's the front line. It's where technical services firms engage their clients. But it's also where senior managers have the least control of their people in the field. And unfortunately, it's where opportunities to develop repeat business are often lost.

We hear this lament time and again. Project Managers invest more time with a company's clients than anyone else in the firm; but we are constantly told that they "have their heads in the sand." They let opportunities slip by, and they miss the chance to *really help* their clients.

## **The Project Manager's Job**

Of course, the number one priority for Project Managers is providing quality service while completing the job on time and within budget. That's what good project managers do --- unfortunately it's *all* that many of them do.

However, another strategic objective for Project Managers is to *help their clients obtain additional services they may need*. In our experience, this second important objective is frequently ignored, even by seasoned professionals. Why so?

First of all, Project Managers are most content when in control. They usually want to keep unknowns to a minimum. And these unknowns include referring their clients to other individuals in their own firm, or suggesting other companies that could provide additional services their clients need.

Secondly, Project Managers are very busy concentrating on their first priority --- providing quality service, on time and on budget. They're in the harness, pulling hard to complete the journey, but they have blinders on.

Why? The root cause is that these Project Managers haven't been *trained* to do anything else. "Project Management" courses concentrate on scope, schedule and budget. Training programs also stress communicating with clients --- usually mentioning that it's important to tell clients when trouble is on the way.

We know that when people are under stress --- and project management can certainly be stressful --- people will do what they have been trained to do --- and these are the only things most Project Managers have been trained to do.

## **Doing a Better Job of Project Management**

How can Project Managers do a better job to help both their clients and their firm?

The key is to learn to think and act differently. In the role of Project Management make a point to understand your client's business. You're often on site and in frequent communication with your clients. What do you observe? How does your client make money? Are they having any problems that are impacting their profitability? What problems are they having that your education, skills and experience equip you to understand? Can you use your skills and imagination to offer your client a different point of view? Can your firm help them solve these problems? Or, can you refer them to a better-equipped firm to help them solve these problems if they are not within your company's expertise?

If Project Managers make the effort to do this, they become *Partners* --- trusted advisors to their clients. This is taking the role of Project Management to the next level, and the start of building a foundation for long-term, repeat business.

*Bob Glassen is a senior consultant/trainer with MBD<sup>i</sup>, a Business Development consultancy based in Charlotte, North Carolina. For nearly three decades, MBD<sup>i</sup> has assisted client firms in leveraging their high level expertise into bottom line business. Information on the company and the MBD<sup>i</sup> Business Development Process® access: [www.mbd.com](http://www.mbd.com).*



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5935 Carnegie Blvd. Charlotte, NC 28209  
704.553.0000 Fax 704.553.0001 [www.mbd.com](http://www.mbd.com)