



Before taking on any project, you need to be sure that you are ready to be a project manager. How you approach project management is a great indicator of the project’s success. The following insights are the mindset that successful project managers adapt here at [COMPANY].

**Be Flexible:** It doesn’t matter how well you plan or how well you manage your project, elements will go wrong. You’ll run into issues that are mistakes that you, your team or company have made. You’ll run into issues that occur because of things outside of your control such as technology issues, vendors that delay the progress, mother nature, and other problems you had no way of predicting. You’ll also run into solutions that didn’t work. And yet, regardless of who is to blame, or what didn’t go right, the end result is your responsibility. If you waste too much time and energy on what isn’t working or what cannot be changed, you won’t have enough time to work toward the ideal solution. To be flexible:

- **Be Connected to Vision:** Always know what you are truly trying to achieve. Know the vision of your project. A vision isn’t always set in concrete. Think of the vision much like the United States Constitution. It’s stable, but it can change, following a set of procedures, if needed. Whenever you feel stuck, frustrated, overwhelmed, uncertain, etc., you need to come back to the vision. Take any element of the project that isn’t working and do a simple analysis of how you can approach that part in a way that will move you closer to the vision. Being focused on the end result frees you up to be creative when you do hit bumps in the project.
- **Let go of right and wrong.** If you feel that you have to be right you’ll be more likely to stick to solutions that are not working. This also creates a culture where your team won’t speak up if they see a better way or when something isn’t working. Often there isn’t ONE way to get the needed result. As a project manager, you have to balance the end result with the resources and methods of getting to that result. Sometimes what seems like the “right” solution is outside of the budget or may require resources you don’t have. That solution isn’t necessarily “wrong,” but it’s not the one that you need. Instead of right and wrong, your focus should always be on balancing resources and methods with the end result. Be flexible and you’ll be surprised at how much easier it is to get work done, how creative your team can be, and how easy it is to limit conflicts.
- **Be Curious!** Ask a lot of open-ended questions. We like to call this “Walk Around with Curiosity.” Don’t accept the first solution. Always try to challenge and poke holes in ideas, especially your own. Give yourself permission to play with ideas. Too often creative thinking is stifled in the rush to reach a solution. Have a standard set of questions that you routinely use as a part of your thought process (and teach these to your team). These will grow and change as you gain more experience, but start with questions such as:
  - What would happen if?
  - What’s the best/worst case scenario?
  - How could this go wrong?
  - What could we do to make that negative a positive?
  - What assumptions are we making about this?
    - How positive are we in those assumptions?
    - Are those assumptions fact or opinion?
  - How will this impact...
    - The vision?
    - The business?
    - Our customers?

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- Our team?
- Any other entity that would be a part of the project or end result?
- What if we didn't do this?

As a side note - remember it is easier to believe that you are being flexible than it is to achieve the desired result. Be aware of why you're making the decisions that you are. Are you too tied to a certain solution? Are you rejecting an idea because it conflicts with something you've believed to be true up to this point? Do you not want to go with a solution because it contradicts something you've said or done? Are you hesitating because of who might object or even who suggested a new solution? Are you avoiding a better solution, because it is more difficult? There are many reasons why you may not be flexible, but the key is to recognize when you are getting in your own way.

**Proactively Solve Problems** - In addition to being flexible as a project manager, your role will be chief fire fighter. When a problem comes up you're the one that has to ensure that the solution is the best one to put out that fire. Too often project managers fail, not because of their plan, but because they were not able to proactively react to problems that happened over the course of the project. Being flexible is a key part of problem solving, but you should also:

- **Stop the Bleeding** - The moment you realize there is a problem your first goal is to stop the bleeding. In some cases there will be no immediate impact and you can focus on a long-term solution. In other cases, there's an immediate negative impact. When this happens, you have to create two solutions. First, is the short-term solution. Focus on this solution first. You don't have to solve the issue. You simply need to stop it from reoccurring and communicate with anyone (clients, vendors, your team, etc.) that you are working on a solution. Once the bleeding is stopped you can focus on the recovery and long-term solution.
- **Don't live in a vacuum.** Be aware of how this issue impacts others.
- **Take ownership of all problems.** It doesn't matter who caused the problem, or if it was within your control or not. You can, and will, deal with that, but as a project manager it is your responsibility to get the project successfully completed.

**Always Prioritize their Work**- Managing capacity by prioritizing is extremely important as a project manager. There is always a lot of work to be done and when you do not prioritize, tasks will end up falling through the cracks. Or, other tasks will be held up before moving forward. Prioritization starts with understanding the level of importance for each task. All tasks are important, but as a project manager you need to be able to take a step back and look at the workload from a bigger point of view.

With each task you have to consider the impact of how important it is to move the project forward, what else will be impacted if that task is held back, and how all the project work is prioritized with day to day work. Now when a task is needed by someone else--a vendor, a client, a boss, another department, etc. they might use words such as emergency, extreme importance, and even express frustration with you. This is not to downplay their needs or to suggest that you disagree with them. It is a reminder that sometimes there will be multiple emergencies at once and you have to make solid decisions about what will get your attention at the time.



Think of an ambulance. Would they stop to help someone with a broken ankle if they were on their way to help someone who was having a life-threatening heart attack? No. They wouldn't, because they've prioritized their work. They will get help to the person with the broken ankle, but not until they've got the heart attack patient stabilized.

**Take Ownership** - A project manager has complete ownership of each task. It's not enough to “just do the work” you have to ensure that the work is done completely, with the best interests of the customers and business, and any follow up is done. You'll be juggling your project and the rest of your job duties. It's important for you to be able to manage a sometimes hectic workload and still be the one driving the project to a successful completion. See more about the ownership mindset here.