

Under-Promise and Under-Deliver

Question:

I hope you can help me. I have a problem setting too high expectations for myself and my team. I am an overachiever and I normally can meet high expectations. But I keep forgetting that the rest of the project team does not have my same ability so it seems like we are always falling short of expectations in the client's eyes. How can I learn to set more reasonable expectations so that the entire project team can be perceived as successful?

Wanda

Answer:

Wanda,

Wow. I thought I held a pretty high opinion of myself, but perhaps you are my equal. You remember that my staff calls me the greatest "Project Manager in the World". I am not prepared to give up this title but perhaps you are the greatest woman project manager in the world. In fact, perhaps you are part of some superhuman race. I may take a project team of handpicked mutant X-men to keep up with you. Why do you even have a project team? It sounds like you can do the work by yourself.

Well Wanda-Woman, I am not sure I can meet your high expectations but let me give it a try. Perhaps others will learn from your question.

Let's start with my general philosophy – under-promise and under-deliver. I know that you have seen a similar approach called under-promise and over-deliver. But I personally don't see the logic for this. I am all for meeting expectations. If you are going to go through the trouble of under-promising, I figure I might as well take advantage of this expectation. What is the purpose of under-promising if you are going to work hard and over-deliver anyway? If this is the case you might as well overpromise as well. Then it looks like you really know what you are doing.

If you under-promise and over-deliver the client will think of you as a low-baller and they will quickly re-set their expectations higher whenever you make a commitment. It leads to a never ending cycle of setting expectations lower and lower, and still the clients expectations become higher and higher.

Your approach should be to be true to your word. When you under-promised, you should then under-deliver. Then everyone will say what a good planner you are. On your next project set the bar even lower – but hit it. After a while you are viewed as someone that can keep a commitment and meet expectations. Before you know it you will be promoted. As you set lower and lower expectations – and achieve them, you will move higher and higher in the organization.

I guess you will not accept my advice since you are already perfect, but perhaps some other slob without your large ego can benefit from this advice.

Now go out there and be average!