

The Project Management Diva

Question:

I'm a project manager in a company with a lot of medium and large size projects. I am currently working on a software implementation project. I have to work with the project manager assigned by the sponsor. She keeps saying that our specifications are bad and not professional. She keeps asking us to deliver things that were not stated in the first place. This is just one example. She is very liked by the client and no one can communicate directly to the client.

Sally

Answer:

Sally,

Such a difficult problem! It appears from your spelling mistakes that you may also be from my country of Putympkin. In fact, I would say you are from the northern region where the pollution causes beautiful sunsets at 4:00 in the afternoon. Yes, I have been to your provisional capital of Tgreksawuty many times.

I am not sure why this contract project manager says that your deliverables are not professional. I really have no idea... No idea at all. I could state that perhaps she does not like you or your team or perhaps she is simply a diva and thinks she is better than you.

I could just leave it at that, but let me try to give you advice in case other readers have similar problems.

One idea is to gain agreement ahead of time on what the deliverable should look like when it is complete. The gasbag Tom Mochal might call this the Completeness and Correctness Criteria (C&C). I just call it the "we all done" criteria. Notice how my names are much more simple and practical. Anyway, this document sets the expectations ahead of time for what it takes for the deliverables to be finished. This does not have to be a long document. It might just be an email. In fact, it does not even matter if the project manager sees it. You can simply point out the document after the project manager criticizes you. The project manager will see that you have outsmarted her, and she will defer to your brilliance and foresight.

Of course, if she is really a diva as I expect, then flattery might actually be a better response. When you submit a document, be sure to compliment the project manager on her hair, her clothes and her intelligence. The beauty of this approach is that you are building credibility with her. She would not dare criticize your work and professionalism now. If she thinks your work is bad, then what will she think about your compliments? If your work is not to be trusted, can your compliments be trusted as well? You see, she will not want to fold up this house of cards.

Summary

I cannot lend you any gold bullets for your squirt gun. Your project manager has a lack of people management skills. I see this all the time from my colleagues on the asbestos project. They think they are better than you, but when it comes down to it they are not. They may be smarter and better looking and have more ambition and better tastes, but they does not mean they are better than you. However, you can take advantage of their pomposity to get your work done with the least effort possible.