

3 Revealing Signs You Need Help Leading Your Projects

If I ask how are your projects going, you might tell me “fine.” But are they? Often, I step in to help companies who are experiencing one or more of these problems with a project:

Sometimes these problems are obvious, and sometimes they are harder to pinpoint. But the bottom line is the same: Your projects aren’t moving forward or succeeding the way they could.

Let’s take a look at these three signs you need help leading your projects – and what you can do about them.

Leading Your Projects Past Inefficiencies

Start with these questions:

- Do you struggle to get projects off the ground?
- Do you have too many projects in motion without enough progress?
- Do you have great teams who just can’t seem to get projects done?
- Are your project managers spread too thin so projects inch along?

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, inefficiency is an issue. To create greater efficiency, try one of these approaches:

Be open to change. Instead of pushing an agenda or driving an approach, be open and observe the situation and environment without judgment. Get other perspectives and learn what part of an idea works or doesn’t work for others. Then **shift gears** or revise your approach. If your team is stuck in “how we always do it,” fresh leadership can help facilitate change.

Yin meets Yang. Some of the most successful work happens when two forces that are seemingly contrary to each other support each other as they interact together. Sometimes bringing in an outside leader provides the opportunity to bring in the right mix of leadership to balance out a team.

Leading Your Projects Past Bandwidth Issues

Bandwidth issues are a major problem in corporate America. We are just too busy, stretched thin and always on. In projects this shows up as:

- In-house leaders too busy or lacking headspace to lead a project well.
- Everyone being stretched so think work always seems to happen just in time before a check in or deadline.
- There are too many late-night scrambles to meet milestones.
- Too much focus on day to day responsibilities and no time or space to be creative or strategic.
- Sticking with old processes or status quo, even when it’s not working.

Some of these challenges are deeply rooted in the culture and take significant time to uproot and address, but some subtle changes can begin to shift things.

One approach is to **bring in a consultant**, like me, to expand your bandwidth. One of the big factors in bandwidth issues is leaders stretched too thin to be effective. Independent leadership is focused on the project, not on the day to day responsibilities of the department. That leaves them free to be strategic and creative—plus they bring fresh perspectives and new ideas from other projects to the table.

Another approach is to **focus on 90 days**. Three months is the perfect increment to reconvene and reassess priorities. A 90-day view allows you to break long-range targets down to bite-size chunks. One of the keys to success is establishing the 3–7 most important priorities that need to be done (or the ‘rocks’) in 90 days. Anything more simply can’t get done. “When everything is important, nothing is important.” An outside consultant can help you see what is important when it feels like you can’t let go of anything.

Leading Your Projects Past Lackluster Efforts

Maybe you do have the bandwidth, but your projects don’t seem to gain traction. Lackluster efforts can slow things down and maybe caused by:

- Lack of leadership to build collaboration or excitement.
- In team conflict creating a rub.
- Difficulty in staying focused & following through – sometimes creating organizational whiplash.
- Lack of accountability or clear direction.

Of all the problems, I’ve seen – this is one I see most easily addressed. Try:

Providing steady force. Most successful projects have a person who is obsessed about organizational clarity around the project idea. They make sure people are communicating within the organization or across teams. They’re fanatical about resolution and forcing conclusions. They’re masters of follow through and keep everyone laser-focused. They provide the cadence and consistency for the team. Don’t have somebody in that role? You need one—if you don’t have the bandwidth in-house, outside leadership can make the difference.

Get on the same page. If you aren’t on the same page, you’ll either make your team uncomfortable or give mixed messages. Plus working at cross-purposes is unproductive. To get past this challenge, hold monthly meetings identify (list all issues, concerns, idea, and disconnects), discuss & solve (IDS) issues.

With a few changes, your projects can shift from grinding along or stalling to succeeding. Current leadership can adjust their approach, and if that doesn’t work or it’s a problem of leadership bandwidth, outside leadership can make a world of difference.

Nobody likes to admit they need help. Yet, so many companies have learned that independent leadership can make a huge difference in project success. It doesn’t mean the manager or leader is doing a bad job, it just means that independent leadership brings something else to the table.



A passionate organizer of people and initiatives, Erica Smigielski brings over twenty years of experience in project leadership to financial software and SaaS companies who want to launch their next big idea. She leads large-scale, complex projects like product launches and company mergers and acquisitions as well as focused efforts to bring structure and process to fast-track businesses. Erica holds certifications as a Stanford Advanced Project Manager as well as a Certified Group Facilitator, making her a master orchestrator of strategic planning, as well as a skillful communicator who can expertly navigate complex group dynamics.