

How to Exit an Engagement with Grace

At times, it can be difficult to see an engagement come to an end. Perhaps you enjoyed working with your client, had built relationships and effective partnerships, or even felt that the work was in your sweet spot and you were in your flow.

Or maybe it's the opposite for you. The focus of work might have shifted so much so that it's no longer fulfilling, leaving you disinterested or even straining relationships you worked so hard to build.

It's also possible the engagement comes to an end for reasons completely outside your control. There could have been an internal re-organization or company acquisition resulting in the project moving to low priority or completely falling off the radar. Maybe the key stakeholder behind your project gave notice and you're left to watch the project 'die on the vine'.

I've been through all of these - most with plenty of notice and some with very short notice. Some exits I welcomed. Some I was bummed over. Either way, it's so important to remember the only thing consistent as an independent consultant is change! And when it's time to wrap up an engagement - all eyes are on you. Which is why it's important to remember these 3 things so you, too, can exit your engagements with grace...

Business is Based on Relationships

Period. How you handle yourself and your client as you exit your engagement is the last impression you leave with them. It's the one that sticks, whether you like it or not, so you want it to be a good one. So good, in fact, that your client is already thinking of another project with which to re-engage you or has a colleague to which they want to introduce you in order to explore other opportunities.

If you felt good about the project and the relationship you maintained with the company/stakeholder, you shouldn't just grab your last paycheck and get out of there. This can be the perfect time to ask for a testimonial or participate in a case study. Hint: offer to draft it for your stakeholder and have them edit it to their own liking for quicker results.

Your Work Reflects Your Brand and Your Own Self-Image

We are professionals. That's why your client hired you, isn't it? They expect the same experience at your project kickoff as your project closure - regardless of how rugged the roads you traveled from kickoff to closure were. Your communications, deliverables, body language, and tone reflect your brand and really who you are - we know this. Yet, this is really tested in tumultuous situations when, perhaps, you're exiting with mixed emotions or short notice.

If you promised a certain level of communication, a certain number of reports, or a certain project pace, it's important to try your best to maintain that during this exit period. If your performance starts to waiver, regardless of how you may justify it to yourself, your client will take notice and, unfortunately, is more likely to remember the bad than the good.

An Engagement is a Business Transaction

Despite budding friendships and established partnerships coming from an engagement, at the end of the day, your project consulting service is a business transaction. You are a luxury expense to your client. If you've particularly enjoyed working with a group of people and really believed in a client's mission, it can be hard not to take the discontinuation of your project personally.

Although Corporate America can be, dare I say, a spiritless environment, I've found the universe helps us by shutting one door so another door can open. Often in unexpected ways, it shows us that we learned what we were meant to learn from one engagement and it's time to move along and learn more in your next one. Take your experiences in stride. You'll grow and stretch in more ways than you can imagine. Endings can be reasons to celebrate the opportunities that lie ahead.

Set up a [20 minute call here](#) to see if we are a good fit to spark your project!



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.