
Moving Up the PM Ladder



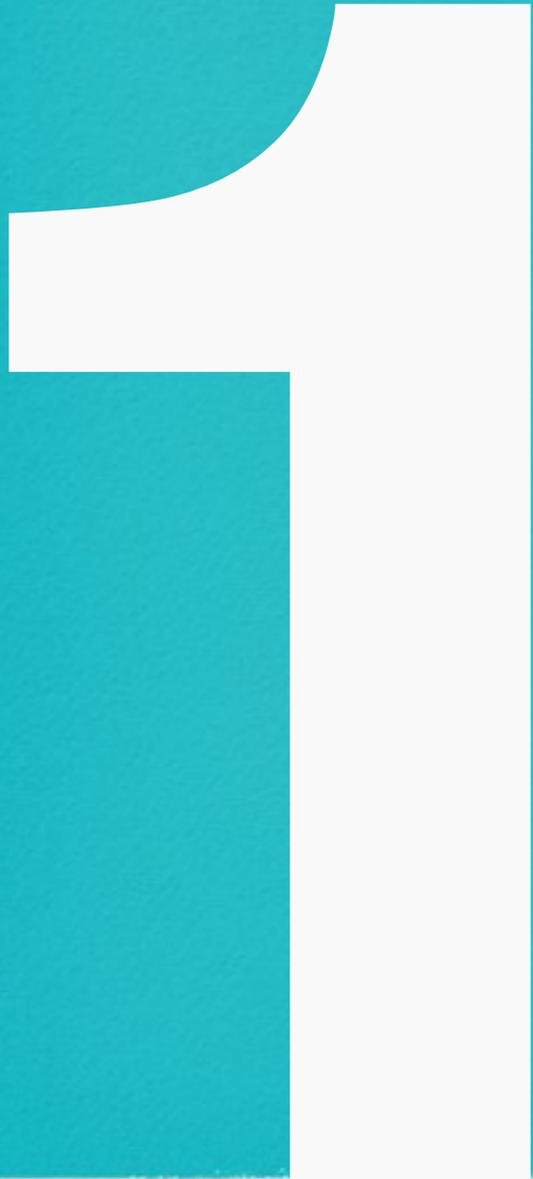
Introduction

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Whether you are looking to become a project manager, currently are a project manager and interested in moving your PM career along or to another organization, or are interested in taking the next step into upper-level management in yours or another organization, this eBook should be of some value to you.

Project management is definitely its own thing. Few jobs are like it, few require such diverse skills, and few give one individual such decision making and leadership authority on a daily basis. We are expected to produce results with little to no help or input, manage diverse skilled resources based on our own background and experience, report to senior management and a customer who may want very different things from us, and retain complete responsibility for sometimes millions of dollars at a time. It can be a daunting task and profession, but it can also be very rewarding and pad a resume like no other profession in the world. The failure rate can be high at times – so the career costs can be as well. But continued successes almost always lead to much greater opportunity and responsibility. It's how we seek these opportunities and responsibilities and what we do with our successes that drive where our own careers are going. And that is what these pages are all about.

Getting into Project Management



Getting into Project Management

Are you thinking about becoming a project manager? Great. Why? Because you're sick of being a developer? Because you can't think of any other career change? Because you want to make more money? While these are all viable reasons for wanting to switch to a PM career path, they are all very bad reasons to do so as well. A PM career is demanding, you often will take the blame for everything and sometimes never get praise for anything (because success is expected). Some of your project customers may even resent you because they are spending money on you that they may see little to no benefit for. You are always proving your worth...and that can be stressful. Basically, a PM career path is not for the faint of heart.

That said, if you really are thinking of project management as your first or next or new career path, I advise that you consider the following three steps or processes to help get you there...

Access a mentor

The most important thing on this list is to find a mentor. Find a project manager in your organization, in a professional networking organization or group, or even one on the internet who's advice and writings you admire (hint...I'm here!), and seek advice, career counseling, and best practices information from this person. It won't happen overnight or in the course of one email. I've written over 2,000 articles on the topics of project successes, failures, and best practices and I'd recommend you read ALL of them. Finding and following a mentor may mean shadowing that person on a full project or possibly a couple of projects which again, is not overnight. Most of my projects have lasted at least six months or more....so if you want to move into project management and do it right, just following this step may take you half a year. Granted, if the right PM opportunity opens up while you're being mentored, take it if you feel ready to em-

bark on the PM journey. Boldly taking leaps is another characteristic of a good project manager. We all know if we truly waited till we were “ready” we’d never get anything done. I thought I needed to wait till I was ready to have children before having any. Well, I didn’t and now I have ten and I could not be happier!

Get training

Never underestimate the value of training....and training is now available all over the place. When I was moving into a project management career, training meant traveling to Boston for a week. Don’t get me wrong, that was great and I got to do some great site seeing and catch both a Red Sox and a Bruins game. But it’s also very expensive and if your organization isn’t paying for it then it’s cost prohibitive. There are many webinars, articles (did I mention 2,000 articles?), and podcasts all over the internet that are available for free. And there is web-based training – which is much more affordable than flying somewhere for a class. Plus, many of the PM software vendors out there have demos and webinars based on their software. Those are good, free sources of PM training that will get you some great hands-on experience with a specific tool (and many of them are very similar so it’s all helpful). The key is to find the time, take the time, and do it.

Take any experience you can get

Finally, take any project management opportunity you can get. Perhaps a project is looking for an extra body to do some requirements gathering or review some document-based deliverables. Or maybe one needs a fill-in project manager for a week during a vacation and slow point in the project (just avoid jumping into a fire right away). Any project experience that you can document for your resume and hopefully quantify in some way

(dollars of responsibility or size of team overseen) will help you both on your resume AND if you need to look for PM work outside of your current organization. I often use the term “fake it till you make it” and it definitely applies to the PM role. We are frequently asked to appear to be experts in areas we know very little about. So be bold, be confident, and seek out a PM-related role as soon as you can. It will show initiative to your executive leadership and help you get your foot in the door faster than your equally aspiring colleagues who aren’t so aggressive.

Summary

Many of us happen into the project management profession by accident. Or out of a government contractual need. Or because someone was mad at us. However we get there, it usually isn’t because we said while we were in high school or college, “Hey, I want to be a project manager!” Project management can mean different things to different people and different things to different organizations. And when I was in high school, I don’t think I had even heard of project management.

But time and again I see professionals who are trying to direct their career paths toward project management and I periodically get questions on how best to make that happen. My answers are always the three things I mentioned in this article. Certification is nice...but you can’t even get that until you have some experience...so the key is to get your foot in the door. It’s all about making yourself available, being dedicated to really wanting it, and being willing to do whatever it takes to get there. It truly is an interesting profession, it’s very rewarding, and often comes with a lot of job autonomy and leadership that can feed an ego and build confidence along the way.

Advancing Your PM Career



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You're a project manager and you've gotten to an advanced and experienced point in your career out of sheer ambition, dumb luck, or organizational necessity. However it happened, here you are and you like it. Now you know that it's the right career for you, it feeds your entrepreneurial spirit, and matches well with your organization and leadership skills.

This is where you want to be and you are seeking to advance within your profession. You want to make a bigger name for yourself. You want to be seen as "successful", someone to seek advice from, that go-to professional ready to take on the next high-profile project.

So how do you get there? What are the proper steps to get you moving in the right direction? How do you shout out to the PM world, "Hey, take note, here I come and I want to be recognized."?

Networking

First, let's discuss networking in PM like-minded groups. Joining an established organization like the Project Management Institute (PMI) is something I would advise the new project manager to do. If you haven't already done that, but you've now established yourself as an accomplished, experienced PM, then now is the time to take that step. There are local PMI chapters located in most of the larger metropolitan areas that meet regularly - usually monthly. Those meetings are a great place to network not only with other project managers but also with PMO directors and other executives who may be looking for a PM with your skill set. Network! And these groups are not limited to PMI. Other Project management standards organizations like Prince2 and others also have groups and chapters where networking is possible - even commonplace.

Certification

Once you've acquired the proper amount of project management work experience hours and the proper amount of formalized training hours, then you can sign up for and sit for the PMI certification exam. Getting there is no small task. First, there's the cost of actual training classes, which can range anywhere from close to free to more than \$3,000 per class. Do you research and figure out what works best for your needs AND meets the training certification requirements (just be sure you aren't wasting time on money on something that won't qualify.) Next comes testing which costs \$400-600 range depending on whether or not you are a PMI member. If you are really dedicated to the PM career path and gaining certification, it would be advisable to sign up for PMI membership, which runs \$130/year.

There are other PM certifications that do not require the experience up front. Of course, no certification will guarantee PM success or even advancement - unless your company has built certification into some sort of career action plan for you - but it looks great on a resume as you seek out a new, expanded role and it serves as an indication to others that you are dedicated to your profession, knowledgeable, and can speak a common language with other certified project managers.

Household name

Finally, seek out notoriety in your profession. Household name isn't quite accurate because I truly doubt that any project manager will ever be considered a household name. However, by going public with your knowledge like publishing, writing for a high profile online forum or blog 2-3 times per month, presenting at conferences or conventions, and publicly mentoring other project managers you can truly establish yourself as an expert

in your field and a go-to person for PM knowledge and advice. You'll be surprised at how many CEOs suddenly recognize your name.

Summary

It's normal for anyone who is dedicated to their profession, interested in capitalizing on their experience and building upon it to want to continue to advance their place in the field. Whether that's at your current organization, testing the waters in another company, or even going out on your own as a consultant, there are many ways to show the world that you mean business and want to expand your role in the project management field. Some of those ways don't come without considerable effort and - in the case of certification - potentially high cost in the range of possibly \$10,000 (hopefully your organization will pay most or all of these costs), . I've highlighted three of those in this article...but that's only the tip of the iceberg. There are certainly many others that you will discover as you venture into new territory.

Taking on Senior Management

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Taking on Senior Management

You've entered the world of project management through whatever means possible (because there usually isn't any direct route) and you've made your mark on the projects that you've managed, the customers that you've engaged, and the organization in general. And now you're ready to move up to bigger and better things. Looking to build and/or direct the project management office (PMO)? Hoping to move into executive management in your current organization? Aspiring to takeover a PMO at another company...or possibly some C-level position?

Are you ready? How would you know you're ready? What skills do you bring to the table that tell the world – and most importantly the hiring manager or HR staff – that you're ready?

Where “up” can I go?

You're a successful PM. What's your next move? Is it a lateral move to another company – perhaps even a competitor - of your current company as long as there is no non-compete agreement in place? You may even want to go out on your own as project management consultant if your experience is broad enough and you have an established reputation as a successful and knowledgeable project leader.

Considering that one Project Management Institute (PMI) survey discussed on LinkedIn indicated that as much as 76% of all projects fail to some degree, building that successful project leader reputation is actually much harder than it sounds. What that means is that taking your PM leadership to the next level is often for an elite, and select, few...definitely not the masses.

Where can a PM go?

To another organization. There is always the “grass is always greener” route. While your colleagues mire their time away at

your old organization, toiling day after day for the same buck you used to make, now you have the opportunity to make much, much more, right? There was a time when this was true...I left one job and company for another for the first time in 1998 after nearly 14 years with the same organization. The result? A whopping 63% pay increase! It used to be if you were good and you shopped your services properly, you could land a great job elsewhere for a nice pay increase. It's not so easy anymore...in fact just looking can get you fired from your current job (hint: don't check "yes" to "can we contact your current employer?"). But if you are the cream of the crop and you do find the right job in another organization, on average you can expect a pay increase of 8-10% in a healthy economic market according to one site I checked. Given the tight job market and economic climate over the last 2-3 years, average increases are between 5-8%. And, as I'm sure many readers of this article are aware, there are many candidates out there who are willing to accept lateral moves, or even a decrease in pay for an opportunity to remain employed. The bottom line when looking – do so discreetly so as not to burn any bridges.

Move to PMO director. This type of move – either within your own organization's PM infrastructure or to the same type of structure at another organization, is likely your first and best move out of the standard PM ranks. Project managers who understand the importance of good resource management, proper attention to career development for those reporting to you, and who have the ability to move mountains, negotiate resources, and are well connected in their organization can make excellent PMO directors. Of course, in order to be a great PMO director, you need to be ready to truly step out of the day-to-day project leadership role and move right into management. The best PMOs are run by dedicated PMO directors, not by part-time project managers. And project managers have a hard time letting

go of the day-to-day customer engagement and team management leadership scenario. Make sure you're truly ready for such a move.

C-level move. The myth of corporate safety, of rising up through the ranks, of getting the gold watch, of getting applauded by your peers is over. Not because the economy is bad. But because innovation and the global economy are better than ever. So keep in mind that making this type of move – or aspiring to this type of move – is not for the faint of heart. Can all PMs aspire to C-level company positions. Not even close. But a select few can – especially those who have shouldered very large projects, shown extreme leadership in dire situations, have saved the day on high profile "lost" projects, and have excellent reputations as decision makers and resource managers. I have a friend who has risen from the project management ranks to the position of vice president with a Fortune 500 financial institution. It happens, but like making the major leagues in baseball, it's only going to happen for a select few.

Summary

People always say you can be anything you want to be if you put your mind to it. While that may be true to some degree, it takes a lot of skill, experience, and some luck thrown in to make those big dreams happen. And we can still move from organization to organization or make things happen as consultants. It takes an entrepreneurial spirit. But I have found – in myself and others – that the best project managers actually do have an entrepreneurial spirit. Maybe some of us truly are born to be project managers. If I had been told that back in the 8th grade maybe I wouldn't have wasted a year in college trying to become a pharmacist...but that's a story for another article.

About the Author



Brad Egeland is a Business Solution Designer and an Information Technology / Project Management consultant and author with over 25 years of software development, management, and project management experience. He has successfully led project initiatives in Manufacturing, Government Contracting, Creative Design, Gaming and Hospitality, Retail Operations, Aviation and Airline, Pharmaceutical, Start-ups, Healthcare, Higher Education, Non-profit, High-Tech, Engineering and general IT.

In addition to his accomplishments in IT development, resource, and project management, he has also authored more than 2,000 expert advice and strategy articles on project management, small business, and information technology for his own website as well as sites and printed material for software and service clients all over the world. Brad is highly regarded as one of the most prolific go-to authors on project management general topics, advice and strategy in the world. He often bases his articles on his own personal experiences, successes and frustrations, providing insights on how to combat issues and deficiencies encountered along the way to the average project manager, business owner or strategist looking for help in a given situation.

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