

De-stress for Success

By Michelle LaBrosse, PMP®, Chief Cheetah and Founder of Cheetah Learning

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Are you proactive or reactive in your work and personal life? Think about your career. Do you jump on tasks as they pop up, putting out fires as you go? Now consider your weekend. Do you wait until plans come to you, or do you make plans to ensure that you are having the kind of free time that you want with family and friends?

Much stress in life comes from not feeling in control and maintaining a state of reactivity to deal with issues and problems that arise. The good news is that there is another way! When you learn simple project management processes, you can reduce your stress load in every facet of your life. Here, at Cheetah Learning, we call this "Being a Cheetah." Cheetah's don't allow stress to control them - they strategically plan out the best route to achieve success, and they stick with it. To be a Cheetah, there are some important concepts to remember:

Life is a Series of Projects When you think "project," many of us think of a concept that lives within the four walls of our office space, unable to escape and be a part of the "real world." In reality, projects are in every part of our life. The more practice you have at treating all aspects of your life as a project, the less stressed you will be and the more success you will find.

Family- The most stressful time of year is often the holidays. And how is a holiday different than most times of the year? You are getting your lovely family together. While this, in most cases, is a good thing, stress can arise because of varying expectations ("I thought we were celebrating with MY family this year?"), unclear scope ("Instead of having a potluck- we have to make the whole dinner!?"), and lack of stakeholder buy in ("I didn't even want to go to your mother's house, this was all your idea!"). If this sounds too familiar, it's time to stop the madness and start the management - Project Management, that is.

Community – As project managers, you have a fantastic asset that your community needs, whether they know it or not. Whether you volunteer at a soup kitchen or on the PTA, you can help implement

PM processes at any organization to help them stand on their own Cheetah paws while you are not there.

Recreation – Whenever I go on vacation with my friend, I am in awe of how much detail she plans; right down to the estimated time of how long it will take us to taxi from the airport to the hotel (taking traffic into consideration), and detailed excel spreadsheet covering all expenses, converted at the most current exchanged rate. I do admit that I am more of an ad-hoc traveler, but I had an epiphany one day when I was standing in the rain looking for a hotel and only finding “no vacancy” signs. Maybe she had a point in her detailed anal-retentive vacation planning after all? I now treat my vacations as a project, and find much more success (and less stress) while enjoying my time away.

Career Development – Any career advancement process, whether it is additional education, obtaining a credential, or starting a business, takes careful planning and special attention to lead time of important activities. Imagine you studied extremely hard for your GMATs, only to find that you missed your top school’s admission deadline by a month and have to wait until next year. Career development requires focused planning and discipline. You got it - now apply it!

Home – You know that unfinished home improvement project that has been hanging over your head for far too long? What would happen if you were managing a project at work that had the same dismal fate as your halfway done fence? You would get moved off that project, and not invited back. Treat your home projects in the same fashion to ensure they are completed. Set up a schedule and stick with it!

Make it Fast, Fun, and Easy to do Projects To be successful at projects, you need to make them ENJOYABLE! Follow these guidelines to create meaningful deliverables for yourself and those around you.

Vision – Incorporate your vision and values into every project that you do. When you focus on the intrinsic rewards that are associated with a project (such as the satisfaction of a job well done, or knowledge that you are working towards a greater goal) you can more easily get past the stresses that come in every project because you have your eye on the big picture.

Service – The more you help others succeed with their projects, the more you help yourself. Use your innate strengths in PM to relieve the stresses that others have in life, and you will find the favor returned where you least expect it and need it most.

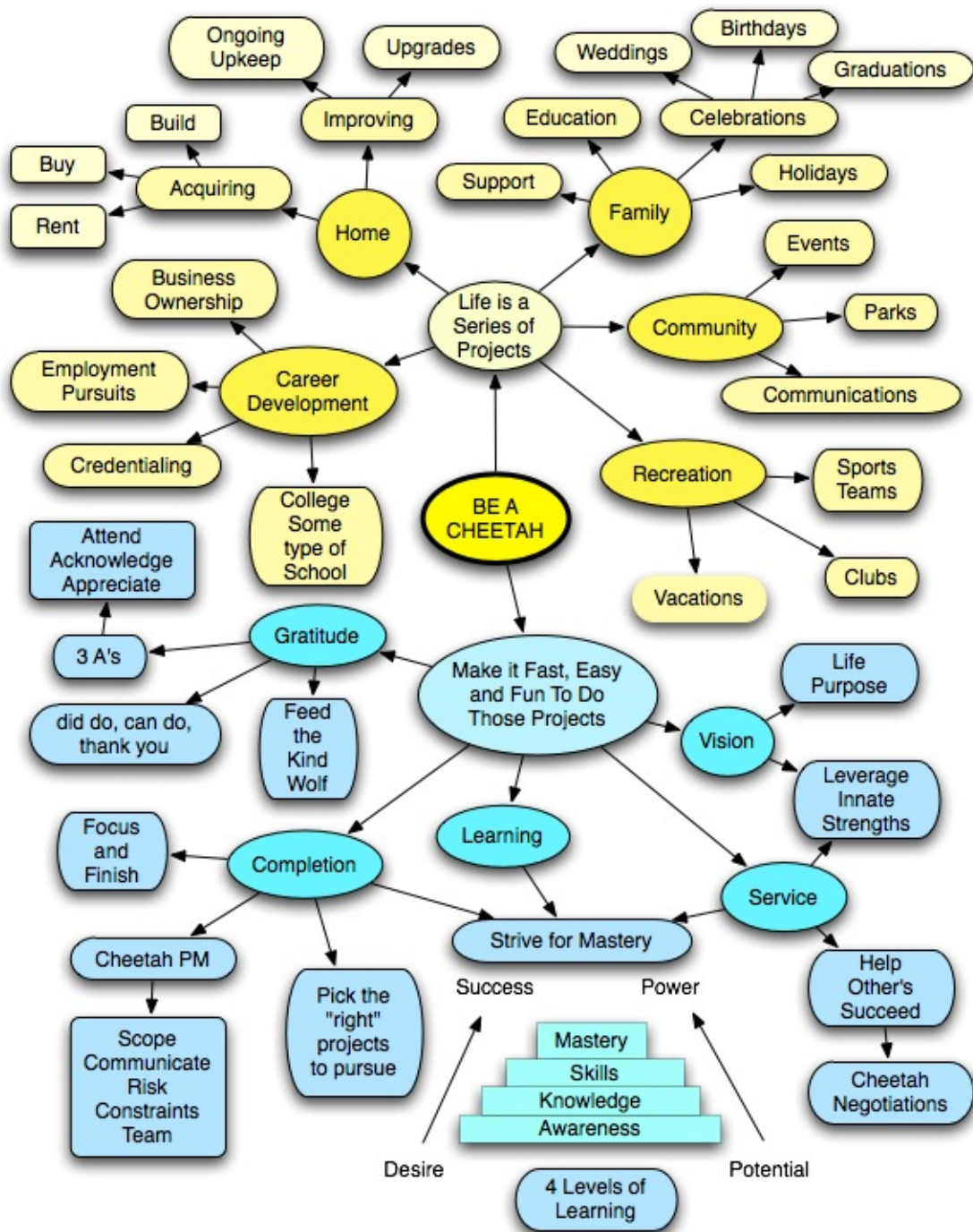
Learning – While many things in life are uncertain, you can be certain of this: the more you practice a skill, the better you will get at it. It takes most individuals approximately 50 hours of practice before they become proficient at a skill. At that point, most people stop practicing. The difference, however, between those that are proficient and those that excel, is the extra time beyond 50 hours spent practicing diligently. Use your life playground to practice managing projects wherever and whenever you can.

Completion – Unfinished projects can make your hair turn grey - believe me I've seen it happen. Throw away any projects that are hidden in your garage or closet that you have no intention on completing, and finish the ones NOW that you do keep.

Gratitude – It is an old native tale that says in each of our hearts, there lives a kind wolf and an angry wolf. Which wolf is stronger depends on which one you feed. Make the conscious choice to feed the kind wolf every day by letting others know that you appreciate them. Saying thank you is one of the greatest gifts we can give to others, and it costs us nothing.

To help you remember how to “be a Cheetah,” print out this mind map below and keep it on your refrigerator, your bathroom mirror, or your office desk. Join the ranks of Cheetah's who practice proactive life skills every day and who find success defined in their own terms, not anyone else's.

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About the Author:



Michelle LaBrosse, PMP, is an entrepreneurial powerhouse with a penchant for making success easy, fun and fast. She is the founder of [Cheetah Learning](#), the [author](#) of the [Cheetah Success Series](#), and a prolific [blogger](#) whose mission is to bring Project Management to the masses.

Cheetah Learning is a virtual company with 100 employees, contractors, and licensees worldwide. To date, more than 30,000 people have become “Cheetahs” using Cheetah Learning’s innovative Project Management and accelerated learning techniques.

Recently honored by the Project Management Institute (PMI®), Cheetah Learning was named Professional Development Provider of the Year at the 2008 PMI® Global Congress. A dynamic keynote speaker and industry thought leader, Michelle was previously recognized by PMI as one of the 25 Most Influential Women in Project Management in the world.

Michelle’s articles have appeared in over 100 publications and web sites around the world. Her monthly column, the [Know How Network](#) is carried by over 400 publications, and her monthly newsletter goes out to more than 50,000 people.

She is a graduate of the Harvard Business School’s Owner President Manager’s (OPM) program and also holds engineering degrees from Syracuse University and the University of Dayton.

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