

The Heart of the Matter

By Michelle LaBrosse, PMP®, Chief Cheetah and Founder of Cheetah Learning, and Kristen Medina, PMP®, Co-Author

As I dashed back to my office after my last-minute gift buying frenzy for the neighborhood holiday party later that evening (which I had completely forgotten about) and struggled up the stairs with boxes of presents and sweat running down my face, I visualized what was in my refrigerator that could possibly pass as an appetizer (which I had signed up to bring to said holiday party). I debated the pros and cons of braving Whole Foods on a Friday night versus my neighbors' faces when I showed up at the party with mini hot dogs on toothpicks. All the while, "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year" was running through my head - I had heard it at least 10 times that day. I couldn't help but think – is it really?!? If so, then what is the *worst* time of the year?

Feeling overwhelmed by stress and pressure to perform is common for many people during the holiday season. Once a time for appreciation and relaxation with family, the holiday season has transformed into a one-upmanship extravaganza. Commercials depicting perfect holiday bliss (accompanied by perfect holiday decoration and delectables) and Pinterest boards showing you how others are making their homes appear as if they were in a Martha Stewart magazine do not help the matter.

I am not very good at dealing with holiday stress – but I am very good at managing projects effectively. This year, I am working on re-imagining the season as "Project Holiday" in an attempt to cut through the crud and get down to heart of what I really want my holidays to be about.

What Matters? In a project, there are many tasks that can be done, but project teams are trained to differentiate between activity and productivity. What are your objectives and scope? Are the tasks you are taking on achieving your most important objectives and are they within your project's scope?

My objectives for this holiday season are to spend as much time with my family as possible while we are all together for such a short amount of time, and to get together with my close friends and show them that they are important to me.

As with any project, it is important to state what is *not* included in the scope of your Project Holiday. For me, my holidays will not include being pressured into attending and participating in holiday parties for people I don't know very well, and will also exclude running around to every household to spread good cheer to please everyone but myself.

Prioritize Your Goals. In Agile, one of the first things you do after you create your backlog (list of functionality desired at end of project) is develop priorities to ensure that the most important items are accomplished first. So while you may have on your list, “decorate the tree, go to Grandma’s house, buy kids’ presents, spend time with family from out of town,” what you make time for shows what you care about. Make sure you are making intentional decisions about what you spend your time on and that this corresponds with your prioritized goals for the holiday season.

Follow Your Heart. While we may call this something different in managing your projects, such as intuition or a gut feeling, the underlying concept to understand is that your subconscious brain picks up more cues from your surrounding than does your conscious brain.

So if your body (gut, heart, whatever) is telling you to do something – pay attention. It may be a family member that casually suggests you come by, and your body tells you that you should go because something in you knows that they need your love and support right then. Or it may be your gut telling you to ditch the neighborhood holiday party and take a bubble bath instead, because you have had a long week and just need a break.

This holiday season, take a step back and remember - what really matters? Doing this will clarify your goals and the actions taken to support these goals, helping you succeed in this project called life.

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 50,000 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 is recognized by PMI as one of the 25 Most Influential Women in Project Management in the world.

Michelle’s articles have appeared in more than 100 publications and websites around the world. Her monthly column, the [Know How Network](#), is carried by over 400 publications. She is a graduate of the Harvard Business School’s Owner/President Management (OPM) program and holds engineering degrees from Syracuse University and the University of Dayton.