

Your Project- Passion or Poison?

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

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Welcome, February. The days are starting to get longer, the snowstorms are (hopefully) subsiding, and Valentines Day is just around the corner. All over the country, you can find different opinions about Saint Valentine's Day. Some people are excited at the prospect of flourishing their loved one with adoration and gifts on this special day, others dread the thought of it, while still others ignore the holiday completely. The enjoyability of this holiday can be circumstantial to what situation you are in. If you are in a new relationship, Valentines Day can act as a finely tuned microscope on your relationship, exploiting the shortcomings or highlighting the strengths, and can force us to decide if the relationship is really good for us, or if it's poison.

Ok, bear with me, as I am not disillusioned to think that I have traded my profession from Project Manager to couples therapist. The point I want to make is that we need to bring the idea of Valentines Day to project management. Use February 14th as your reminder to sit down, take a look at the project you are currently working on, and find out if your project still deserves your passion or if it is a poisonous labor of love that needs to be "dumped". Too often, Project Managers invest so much time, effort, and capital into a project that they can't recognize when the project has turned bad, thinking that the only option is to see the project through.

Signs of a poisonous project that you should "break up" with include:

Lack of clear requirements from the start. It is imperative that a project team knows exactly what they are working towards, right from the very beginning of a project, with minimal ambiguities. Imagine cupid and his arrow with no clear target in site. Cupid wastes all of his time flying around, shooting at everything, in hopes that he nails the right target (meanwhile spending a ton of money to find this target). Demand clear Requirements Documentation, as well as a defined Change Control System if these requirements should change. If you don't have these, then you need to dump the project, as the project will not only lose money, but also negatively effect your Project Manager reputation.

Unreasonable budget estimates. The person creating the project budget cannot be sitting in their comfortable chair behind their CFO name placard running excel sheets while the project team works in another wing. The budget needs to be created by the core project team and by those with the best idea of what efforts are needed to complete project tasks, and at what cost.

Change in the need for project deliverable. Before you begin the execution phase of a project, revisit the project in the context of the company's strategic

plan. Does the project still fit the needs of the company, or did the company's strategic direction change while your project went through the Initiation and Planning phases, leaving you with a project that no longer makes sense at the Execution phase? It is better to cancel a project early on, before incurring unnecessary costs, than it is to wait until you have a perfectly good deliverable that is not needed.

Your project is a “keeper” and deserves your passion if:

Good communication leads to good results. As with any good relationship, communication is key. This is also true for the project you are working on. It also rings true for all project stakeholders, including the project manager, team members, sponsors, upper management and customers.

Something of value is created every 3 months. It doesn't matter how long your project timeframe is. Something useful to your organization should be created every three months while the project is underway to ensure that your project is not a black hole that depletes resources and delivers no value.

Clear direction. It is impossible to be passionate about a vague concept. A project that has a clear vision, a well defined deliverable, and an explanation as to how the deliverable will aid in the strategic direction of the entire organization, is one that is worthy of your time and passion.

This Valentines Day, make sure that you get some one-on-one time with your project, and look at it clearly for what it is, and not for what you want it to be. When you take off your rose-colored glasses and get down to the facts, you may find that your project is really a frog - but hopefully it's prince charming.

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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. Her radio program, **Your World Your Way**, is a weekly broadcast that is an inspiring and practical look at how Project Management fuels success.

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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