

Project Management as Sunscreen: How to Avoid Getting Burned

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

When the summer sun beats down, there's always someone in the family who reminds you to put on your sunscreen. Wouldn't it be nice if there was a way to easily avoid getting burned at work? There is. It's called Project Management.

Grab a bottle of water and put on your baseball cap and think about Project Management as SPF 45 for business.

Here's seven ways that Project Management can help you avoid getting burned at work:

- 1. Set Expectations with a Project Agreement**

Don't skip the project agreement because you're pressed for time, or you think the project is too inconsequential. It's often the small projects that can unexpectedly erupt and catch us off-guard because we were thinking: "This is going to be an easy one." Project agreements help to eliminate unnecessary conflict because objectives, expectations, timelines, and roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. If some team members are working virtually, it's important to update the project agreement regularly, and post it to the collaborative work environment or e-mail it to the team.

- 2. Get Clear Contracts in Place with Vendors and Partners**

Make sure you have clarified all contracts with any vendors, consultants or partners before you kick off the project. Don't make assumptions about skill levels and reliability if you've never worked together before. Go over deadlines and deliverables to make sure the entire team is clear about their responsibilities. While it's commonplace today to work with outside consultants, problems often arise when we work with someone for the first time. A good rule of thumb is to set your first deadline early on, so you can assess where every one on the team is and make any necessary corrections quickly.

- 3. Schedule Regular Communication**

It's important to have a regular time for reporting both progress and potential pitfalls to the team. This keeps people on track and gives everyone the discipline of a team check-in. It's ideal if there is a standing time every week or every month – depending on your project milestones. Remember to build in time for feedback and coaching.

- 4. Set Rules of Responsiveness**

It's important to define what the rules of responsiveness are for your culture. This is especially true when the team is new, or you've added new people on board. How quickly are people expected to return an e-

mail, an instant message, or a phone call? What is your protocol when people are out of the office or on vacation? If you're in a customer-service environment, it's important to have clear expectations regarding how to respond to all customer inquiries.

5. Don't Bury the Lead

Have you ever missed a deadline or important information because you didn't read beyond the first paragraph? Train your team to use e-mail effectively, and lead with what is most important. Also, encourage people to use the old-fashioned phone when something isn't getting done via e-mail. The human voice is a powerful tool in the world of e-mail.

6. Create Standards that Build a Cohesive Culture

What are your standards of quality? How do you define excellence? What does your brand mean to each employee? Making sure everyone knows the answers to those three questions is important in reaching your goals and getting the results you want.

7. Take Hiring Seriously

We've all made bad hires, and often it's because we didn't do any due diligence. We had a project, and we needed it done, and we jumped. Take the time to drill down on the skills, past work performance, and references of both candidates and contractors. During the interview, make sure you're listening more than you're talking. People will reveal themselves if they are given the opportunity. Develop questions that require thinking so you can get a sense of how this person would approach a problem. Don't ask questions that people expect such as: "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" Instead try: "Tell me about a work experience where you failed and how you handled it?"

So, if you're working on a team where the temperature is rising, make sure you use your Project Management skills to protect yourself and keep your project on track. And just like your sunscreen, don't be afraid to apply your Project Management know how liberally.

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Register for [Cheetah's Risk Management Course](#) with promo code **SPF45** and get \$50.00 off the regular price of tuition. This offer is good until August 31, 2010, so put down the cooler and umbrella, and register today to keep the burn away!

Chief Cheetah Podcast and Cheetah Fan Club

Want to hear what Michelle LaBrosse, PMP®, and Chief Cheetah has to say about Project Management as Sunscreen? Download our podcast at <http://podcast.cheetahlearning.com/podcastgen/> and hear the words straight from the Cheetah's mouth. Or visit Cheetah's fan club on Facebook at

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Cheetah-Learning/252859238455?ref=nf#/pages/Cheetah-Learning/252859238455?v=wall&ref=nf> for a daily Cheetah Tip to Keep You Tops.

About Cheetah Learning and the Know How Network

The Know How Network is a monthly column written by Michelle LaBrosse, the founder and Chief Cheetah of Cheetah Learning. Distributed to hundreds of newsletters and media outlets around the world, the Know How Network brings the promise, purpose and passion of Project Management to people everywhere. Visit www.cheetahlearning.com to learn more about Cheetah PM, the fastest way to learn about Project Management and get your PMP. You can also get your career in gear with [CheetahWare](#), free Project Management tools.

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's expertise in project management is highly regarded in the industry. 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.

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.

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.

She lives in Nevada with her family and likes to rejuvenate in Alaska where you'll often find her kayaking, hiking, and riding her motorcycle.

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