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Project Management Best Practices
By Jeff Merron

The individual who was born to be a project manager is a rarity. If you've been given the title (and the responsibilities that go along with it), you may have had little or no prior training. Your expertise may be in traditional management or the specific subject matter or technical knowledge needed for the project at hand. Some quick studying, a little consulting and some common sense would probably allow you to muddle through the project management process.

But there are other actions you can take to be truly effective. The following represent best practices for meeting project challenges head on -- and emerging victorious.

Build a Solid Team

According to Scott Berkun, a former Microsoft program manager who's now a consultant based in Seattle, Wash., the best way to manage a project and complete it successfully is to select an "all-star" team. "You do always want stars -- provided they are stars that will fit with the team," he says. "If you can't find a star that fits the team, you want the best possible person that does fit."

But Jeff Davidson, executive director of the Breathing Space Institute in Chapel Hill, N.C., has a different view. "The best single measure to ensure that team members stay on track and on time is really to assemble a team composed of individuals who have a demonstrated history of doing just that," he says.

Chart Your Progress

In most cases, however, your team is assigned to you, and the best method for keeping a team on track -- and communicating clearly -- is to post a graph that shows project progress and has each person's progress charted in some way. This way, says Davidson, "everyone can look up on the chart and see what everyone else is doing."

But this method only works when the project manager has already plotted out realistic assessments of what each team member can offer, says Davidson. In this way, goals and milestones are achievable.