

IN SEARCH OF A PROFESSIONAL PROJECT MANAGER

TWENTY QUESTIONS

Introduction

The talent, skills, training, experience and motivation of a successful senior Project Manager is a unique profile. The demands of today's systems projects are many and require special people to ensure successful outcomes.

In searching for the "right" person, a carefully designed set of questions can be extremely helpful in winnowing out the very best. The following questions are intended to help organizations or sponsors separate out the winners.

Questions

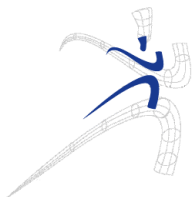
The following questions are intended to have the candidate expound in their approaches, strategies and experiences. No question can be given a "yes" or "no" answer. Conducted properly, these question will take up to two hours to review with a candidate.

Planning

The question should be asked "What is your approach to planning?" The candidate should be encouraged to expound on the various types of projects and the considerations (for example, risk, size, distribution, client experience, environment, etc.) that might affect the plan. How long would it take to produce a plan? What are the first steps you would pursue in developing a plan.

Delivery Strategies

In completing the work, what options might be available in delivering a new system and what are the considerations involved in each. For example, one might choose to deliver a system in small pieces. What implications does this have for time, cost, testing, communication ,etc?



Controlling Work

What vehicles do you use for controlling work? How do you break down a large effort into more manageable portions?

Coping with Change

What vehicles and approaches do you use to cope with change? For example, changes in functionality, sponsors, business, team members, etc.

Selling Concepts

Often, Project Managers are required to “sell” new ideas or new approaches to others during the course of a project. What is your approach to convincing others?

Communication

Informing others is a major need for large initiatives. What approaches of means do you use to insure people are informed of rationale, progress and next steps?

Success

What are the measures that constitute a successful project?

Personal High

For you, what makes the business of project management a personally satisfying role? What evidence do you seek to fulfil this need?

Multiple Projects

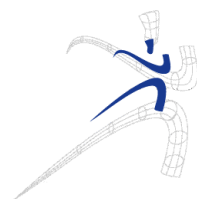
Large projects really break down into a series of smaller projects. How do you handle multiple projects? What mechanisms do you use to organize your time and energies to ensure progress and risk management on all of the pieces?

WIIFM

In large projects, the person needs of the participants (i.e., “What’s in it for me” or WIIFM) is an important dimension. How do you determine these individual needs?

No Authority

Often, the Project Manager must elicit support, decisions, effort and deliverables from individuals or groups outside the direct scope of the project. In some cases, the Project Manager has little or no authority, yet the work must get done. How do you get results without authority?



Quality

What mechanisms and techniques do you use to ensure quality outcomes?

Building Momentum

What approaches do you use to develop sustainable momentum for a project?

Building Team

How do you proceed to develop a sense of teamwork and participation?

When to Get Help

How do you know when to get help? What sources do you use?

Crisis

If you have identified that your project is experiencing a crisis, what do you do?

Reluctant Client

How do you deal with clients who are reluctant to participate, to follow project approaches, to support project efforts, etc?

Negativity

Not everyone involved in large projects is a believer". How do you accommodate the negative ones and ensure their maximum contribution and minimize their negative affects on others?

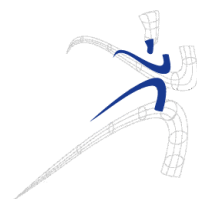
Rejection

Not all of your ideas, approaches, solutions, etc. will be approved. Many employees are threatened by external consultants. How do handle the personal rejection that could be a part of these situations?

The questions above are difficult and will require serious concentration by both the candidates and the interviewer. Expect to do no more than four interviews in a single day. The initial answer to a question will require the interviewer to pick up on the answer and extrapolate the implications to secondary questions in each of the categories.

What to Look For

Although the answers to the questions themselves are critical, interviewers need to make some overall assessments that should show through the interviewing process. These



attributes include the following:

Energy

Does the candidate exhibit a high energy level and a “sense of urgency “ for the work? Is their a strong rebound mechanism? Is their a confident “can do” and “do it now” approach?

Varied Attack

Does the candidate exhibit the capability to attack problems with a large variety of approaches? Is their high flexibility in the range of tools and techniques?

Process

When the answer is not obvious does the candidate have a series of process vehicles or mechanisms that can be applied to determine the answer? Watch out for the candidate who only has process and no content or all content and no process. A strong balance is needed here

Experience

Look for the candidate who has experience all manner of projects in a wide variety of business settings and roles. For example:

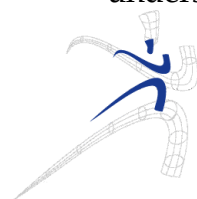
- public sector, private sector
- large projects
- small, high risk, high visibility
- rescues
- reviews, quality assurance
- sophisticated users, reverse
- technically complex, reverse
- phased, big bang, prototyping.

Positive

The successful Project Manager must inspire comfort and confidence in all the people associated with the effort. A strong sense of the positive is a critical ingredient

Practicality

The systems world is full of theory, new theory and “theory of the day”. Prophets and disciples of the various theories and approaches abound. Yet, these are rarely the people who get the job done at the end of the day. Look for the person who understands the theories, yet who can break through the words and deliver the hard



goods. Pragmatism is often in short supply and successful Project Manager will have unending questions of materiality, practicality and reasonableness.

Service

On the spectrum between a “control type” and a service orientation, look for the individual who leans strongly to the service approach. The days of feudalism are long gone.

Conclusion

Finding the right Project Manager for your project is a critical ingredient for success. These very special people are always in short supply coupled with high demand. The process and questions above will help you find an effective Project Manager from among the many pretenders.

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