



Kicking Off the Project Team

Author: Gina Abudi, MBA, Partner/VP Peak Performance Group, Inc.

One of the most important things a team leader can do is find time to kick off the start of the project with the project team. I'm not talking about day 1 and the group is together ready to dig in on the project. Prior to the actual start of the project the team should be getting together to get to know each other and learn about the project they are tasked with completing. This post will provide you some methods to kick off the start of the project. They are in the order of preferred to least preferred method.

In addition to allowing the team members to get to know each other; you, as the project lead, would of course spend time discussing the project, including: purpose of the project (objectives/goals), business units or divisions involved, project sponsor, stakeholders, budget, timeline, etc.

Face-to-Face Meeting

One of the best ways to get the team together is via a face-to-face meeting. This is the most preferred method. Sometimes this is difficult when the team includes members from all over the world, but when possible – get the team together – even if it will be the only time during the project that the team is actually all together in one place face-to-face.

A face-to-face meeting provides you many options for getting the team introduced and kicking-off the project. For example:

- Lunch or dinner get-together
- Team building exercises
- Brief presentations by team members about themselves: past projects, hobbies/interests, etc.

Certainly if you are bringing team members in from other parts of the organization, have them come in the night before for a dinner and brief introduction meeting and then have the next day be about team building exercises and brief presentations by the team members and by you, as project lead, about the project.

Any of the following books will provide some options for team building activities to get the team started off on the right foot:

Quick Team-Building Activities for Busy Managers: 50 Exercises that Get Results in Just 15 Minutes

(Author: Brian Cole Miller)

More Quick Team-Building Activities for Busy Managers: 50 New Exercises That Get Results in Just 15 Minutes (Author: Brian Cole Miller)



The Big Book of Team Building Games: Trust-Building Activities, Team Spirit Exercises, and Other Fun Things to Do (Authors: John Newstrom and Edward Scannell)

In addition to the books listed, there are many other resources available. Search the Internet for ideas on team building exercises.

Virtual Meeting

If you are unable to get the team together for a face-to-face meeting, try a virtual meeting. There are many platforms that enable virtual meetings, such as Illuminate and Adobe Connect Pro. A virtual meeting will enable the individuals to see each other (assuming they have cameras attached to their computers) and collaborate and share information. You can also have break out rooms for larger project teams in order to have smaller groups get together to talk and share information. Options for team building in a virtual setting include:

- Team building exercises (done virtually)
- Brief presentations by team members about themselves: past projects, hobbies/interests, etc.

While this is not as beneficial as a face-to-face meeting, a virtual meeting still enables the individuals to feel connected to each other. Given the technology available for virtual meetings, you can still have team building activities and the team members can still develop a rapport with each other and share information and begin to get comfortable with each other.

If you are able to get part of the team together face-to-face and the balance in a virtual meeting, it's still better than not getting together as a group at all. If you do take this route, make sure the individuals attending virtually feel like participants and have sufficient time to share information with those individuals who are face-to-face. I might suggest you don't have a dinner the night before since the virtual participants will not be able to attend. Although, I suppose, if you have a group virtually in one location, they could go to dinner as one group and the face-to-face group could go as another. In which case, make sure you set aside some time the next day to discuss the dinners and what everyone learned about each other. Be creative! Have some other ideas? Please do share them in the Comment field below.

Teleconference

If a face-to-face or virtual meeting (or some combination) is just not possible, at least get the group together via a conference call. The team members can introduce themselves to each other – share information about their strengths, types of projects they have worked on and their role/responsibilities on those projects, and information about themselves personally so that they can get to know each other. The project lead will talk about the project specifically and also share information about him/herself.



Since team building exercises are not possible (or, I suppose technically possible but certainly not effective) via a conference call, it is important that time is spent ensuring that team members get to talk about themselves and get to learn about each other.

Email

Another option is sharing information via email. If there is no other option, at least have the team members email each other sharing the same information discussed above under “teleconference.” Certainly this is not the best option, but it will enable the team members to at least get to know each other and have communicated prior to the actual kick off of the project.

Portal

If you are able to set up a portal solution – a “get together place” for the team as they work on the project, this may also be a viable option for communication prior to the actual project start date. The portal solution, when used as a collaboration tool/knowledge resource for the project, may include:

- Project information
- Status reports
- Project schedule/timeline
- Project documentation
- Tools and templates
- Special project team member information (e.g., problem solvers, software specialists)
- Organization-wide “go to” people/resources
- Document sharing
- Best practices and processes

Why not use this portal as a place for the project team members to place information about themselves – similar to what you are asking them to share via a conference call or email? This can be a good tool for the team members to share information and discuss past projects and help them get to know each other when they can’t meet face-to-face. Plus, it gives them some practice using the portal.

Summary

As you can imagine, if you can get the team face-to-face, there is a better chance of getting them through the stages of team development quicker. You may need to make the business case for why the company should spend the money to get everyone together face-to-face. If so, discuss the benefits of the team getting comfortable with each other and how that links back to their ability to work together more effectively as a team, therefore getting the project off to a good start.

Other options not considered here? What have you done that is creative?