

Myths of Project Management Training

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This article was adapted from an article written by Dave Stein entitled "The 13 Myths of Sales Training." The subject matter may be different, but it seems that the myths are similar!

Myth #1: Even bad training is better than none. Wrong! Experience shows that the vast majority of project management training does not produce any change in the participants' behavior. Spending time and money on ineffective training is worse than no training at all, since it provides management with a false sense that they have done the right thing.

Myth #2: The top training firms are a safe bet. Wrong! The top training firms use mostly contract trainers who "show up and teach." You may get a great instructor for one program and a so-so trainer for the next.

Myth #3: Project management training will help our organization improve its project management. Wrong! Skills training is a start, but it's only a start. Training doesn't address key organizational issues such as not having the right people in the right positions or not having an effective methodology. The organization must create an environment for success.

Myth #4: Traditional project management training is now obsolete. Wrong! The basics of project management haven't changed. Your project management team must be able to manage the stakeholder relationships, develop a plan, measure progress and performance, and ensure that the product of the project will be accepted by the customers. Many of the so-called "revolutionary" techniques are simply old wine in a new bottle.

Myth #5: My best people don't need training. Wrong! The world's top professionals know that if they don't keep their skills honed and up-to-date, they'll be scrambling just like everyone else. While training for top performers must be tailored to their unique needs, not providing them with training is the wrong approach.

Myth #6: Managers and executives need not attend. Wrong! Managers and execs are involved in project management, so they must be knowledgeable about the subject. They need to be part of the support infrastructure to provide coaching and guidance, and they need to prove to project team members that the training is important enough for them to attend as well.

Myth #7: You can't measure training ROI. Wrong! While it might seem as if there are too many variables to measure project management success, it is actually rather easy to measure the performance of a team before and after training. All that's needed is a "control" group that doesn't undergo the training.

Myth #8: Learning is mostly in the classroom. Wrong! Post-program reinforcement is critical to success. That comes in the form of coaching, technology support, refreshers, and reinforcement.

Myth #9: I can train the mediocre to excel. Wrong! You can't train intelligence, drive, integrity, personality, analytical thinking, optimism, and confidence into someone and these are required traits for most project manager positions. What you can train is skills such as planning, communication, relationship-building, motivation, business knowledge, negotiation, and so forth.

Myth #10: Classroom training is the best medium. Wrong! As project teams become more and more diverse (generational, cultural, geographical, experiential) classroom training alone doesn't do the job for a larger and larger sampling of the audience. Research reveals that a mixture of classroom, self-paced learning, coaching, e-learning, etc., is optimal for most situations.

Myth #11: Providing "tips" is as good as training. Wrong! Under the right circumstances, carefully selected tips and tricks can be incorporated into an overall approach to project management, but signing your project managers up to for blogs and newsletters as the primary form of education does them a disservice.

Myth #12: "Off the shelf" training works. Wrong! Trainers must tailor or customize their content for each unique situation. A pharmaceutical PM will not connect with a case study on software development. Similarly, a medium-sized business isn't likely to learn much from studying the "best practices" inside a giant company like GE.

Myth #13: I can skimp on the "extras". Wrong! A project management training program that doesn't include senior manager training, post-session follow-ups, and tools to reinforce behavior cannot possibly drive the long-term changes that will create future strength in project management. These are critical components of any PM improvement initiative; they are not optional "nice-to-haves."