**Project Management: You Must Communicate!**

It can be difficult to facilitate rapport between peers who have never met, especially in an online class. This was a challenge I faced when I took on the role of project manager in my most recent technical communications class. In online settings, communication can feel unnatural, and many people are hesitant to engage with their peers - they simply do not know where to start. As a project manager, I felt pressured to initiate contact, but also experienced this same hesitation. I learned that the best thing you can do is to take initiative and break the ice in spite of these feelings.



**The Importance of Communication Tools**

A recent blog post from [Monday.com](https://monday.com/blog/project-management/project-management-challenges/) describes a lack of communication as one of the top 9 project management challenges, stating that "Good communication means team members work well together, tasks are allocated efficiently, and stakeholders are kept in the loop about project progress". For me, this entailed establishing contact with my team members and starting a conversation. I quickly discovered that the tools we were using were not conducive to group work. For example, I attempted to start conversations through Canvas and email, but these mediums were too formal and did not provide an interactive experience. This challenged me to explore other options, and I ultimately decide that an instant messaging solution would best meet the needs of my team. We agreed to use Slack, which proved to be a much more effective communication tool for group projects. Slack gave us the flexibility to communicate within a private channel, and all content was visible to team members.

Over the course of my time as a project manager, I became aware of how critical other software tools can be to project success. Modern project management is constantly increasing with scope and complexity, and having the proper tools can make the difference between a disorganized mess and a well-executed project. As a project manager, I sometimes found it challenging to work with my team member’s conflicting schedules. After some failed attempts at impromptu meetings, I came to rely on Google Calendars to schedule Zoom meetings on a weekly basis. This was incredibly helpful because it established a concrete time for us to meet, and we could all easily reference the calendar for meeting times. Keeping these meetings organized helped facilitate important conversations and allowed us to review upcoming projects, create an agenda, and move forward confidently with a documented plan.



**Knowing Your Team**

I came to recognize the importance of getting to know your team members on a personal level. As stated in an article by [Management Study Guide](https://www.managementstudyguide.com/importance-of-knowing-employees.htm), "Managers need to know their employees well to expect them to contribute their best", and that "Knowing employees well leads to a healthy work culture." Everyone offers a unique perspective and unique talents that they bring to the table. Knowing your team allows you to tailor your approach to the individual, establish rapport, and build strong working relationships. This encourages a positive working environment for everyone involved, directly enhancing team productivity. As a manager, knowledge of your team also empowers you to play to their individual strengths and to assign tasks that compliment their skills. As I began to recognize the strengths of my team members, we began to fall into unofficial roles.

**A Technical Writer's Perspective**

Casey Burnham, a senior technical writer with over 12 years of experience, mentors me in my current position as a junior technical writer. According to Casey, effective communication is the most important characteristic of a successful technical writer and project manager. Throughout the course of her career, Casey has communicated with a variety of contacts to create documentation that meets user needs. In her experience, the most succesful projects were a direct result of clear expectations and a transparent communication style. In speaking with Casey, she said "The outcome of a project really depends on who you're working with, and if they are able and willing to give you the information that you need." On the contrary, Casey is easily frustrated when she needs clarification about the documentation she is being asked to create, but the experts (SMEs) provide vague feedback or fail to communicate entirely. This knowledge has made her cognizant of the way she is communicating with others to minimize ambiguity. "I always try to make my written communication as clear as possible. I've been burned too many times in the past when people have misinterpreted what I'm trying to say," says Casey.

My experience as a project manager has instilled a greater appreciation for being an effective communicator. The profound impact that communication style can have on project success is often taken for granted or completely overlooked, and it is not a factor I had thought about before. Moving forward in my career as a technical writer, I aim to stay aware of this impact so that I can achieve the best possible outcomes in all of my future projects.

**References**

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