News

The king pin, not the king

ERIE--It's been said that the effective project manager is the king pin, not the king. And

unlike future royalty, most of whom spend a lifetime in training, a Penn State researcher

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Sponsored by Call 898-6220 has found that new project managers often lack formal education in the myriad delicate skills needed to tackle the complex tasks that await them.

"Most project managers fall into their responsibilities by happenstance rather than calculation," said Dr. Jeffrey K. rinto, assistant professor of management at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College. "Very few people grow up with the dream of becoming a project manager, but the reality is that many people are, and many more will be."

Pinto and Dr. Om P. Kharbanda, a cost and management consultant in Bombay, India, offer tips and wish-I-had-knowns to "accidental" project managers in their forthcoming book, "Leading Your Team to Success: How to be a Successful Project Manager," to be published this winter by Van Nostrand Reinhold. Their "vital dozen:"

1. Understand the context of project management. "Because projects exist outside the established hierarchy they threaten the status quo," Pinto said. "It's important that project managers walk into their new role with their eyes wide open."

2. Enthusiasm and despair are both infectious. "Project managers are like mini billboards. They project an image and attitude that signals the current status of the project and its likelihood for success." 3. Recognize team conflict as progress. The conflict inherent

in the stages of group development should be welcomed. Interpersonal problems should be dealt with swiftly. "If pushed below the surface, they'll fester." Pinto warns.

4. Understand your stakeholders. "It's impossible to please all stakeholders all the time," Pinto said. "Project managers need to forget the idea of maximizing everyone's happiness and concentrate instead on maintaining satisfactory relations."

5. Accept the political nature of organizations, and use them to your advantage.

6. Lead from the front. An inflexible leader can ruin a project. It's important to develop the qualities that distinguish "leaders" from those who simply manage.

7. Understand "success." A successful project was once one that was brought in on time, under budget, and performed as expected. Pinto and Kharbanda add a fourth hurdle for the '90s: customer satisfaction.

8. Build and maintain a cohesive team. "The project manager's job is to do whatever's necessary to build and maintain the health of the team." Pinto advises. "Sometimes it can be done traditionally; sometimes you need to resort to less conventional methods, like throwing a party or

organizing a field trip. The payoff from a cohesive project team cannot be overestimated."

9. One look forward is worth two looks back. You can't control the future, but a proactive manager can control his or her response to it.

"It's important that project managers walk into their new role with their eyes wide open."

- Dr. Jeffery Pinto

10. Remember what you're trying to do. Don't get bogged down in minutia.

11. Use time carefully, or it will use you.

12. Above all, plan, plan, plan. "Project managers must not only plan, but also be smart enough to recognize mistakes and change their strategy accordingly."

"Effective project managers operate less as directive and autocratic decision-makers and more as facilitators, team members, and cheerleaders," Pinto said. "Accidental project managers may possess the will to succeed but lack the skills that come only from comprehensive training or considerable time spent in the trenches."

ERIE METROPOLITAN TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Effective November 19, 1994

No service on the following holidays New Year's, Easter, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas

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