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Project Management Through Client Management

by

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction on how to manage a project through managing the client. Have you ever met a Project Manager that stated publicly that he's not a good project manager? Of course not! Every Project Manager believes he is a good manager. But does completing a project really prove you're a good manager? What about the Project Managers that complete their projects but lose their clients in the process? Does that make them good Project Managers from their client's perspective... from their employer's perspective... from the other Project Managers in the company... or from their own staff's perspective?

Part of being a good Project Manager includes working with the Client in the concept development, design, permitting, and construction process. Not working effectively with the Client in any one of these stages will pretty much eliminate you from future work with this Client. How many times has this already happened to you or to other Project Managers you know? Did you wonder why you never got another project from that Client... after all, you did complete the project so all is good, right? The answer to that question is a resounding "Maybe not!" If that's the case, what should you be doing differently with your current Clients and their projects?

In my professional engineering career, I've been a consultant, a Project Manager, and, at other times, I've been a client. So, I've seen all sides of the project development experience. Unfortunately, I must admit that I've seen many more poor Project Managers than I've seen good Project Managers. And I've seen many that "claimed" to be a Project Manager that had no idea what the title implied or what was expected by the position. This course is for all of those that honestly want to be a truly effective Project Manager.

Surprisingly, there are very few companies that provide training, tutoring, mentoring, or even funding for Project Management courses to their staff. These companies simply expect their staff to somehow magically absorb the knowledge necessary to become an effective Project Manager. Unfortunately, that is like reinventing the wheel again and again and again.



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Introduction...

No professional... architect, engineer, surveyor, or other... graduated from a university as a Professional... *OR... as a Project Manager*. But rather, these proud graduates *think* they know what they need to become a professional and a Project Manager. After all, they just finished all of the academic courses that their prestigious universities required them to complete so they could graduate and conquer the world. After graduation, they interviewed, spoke confidently of their “capabilities”, got hired by a firm, and then... during the first week of work... slammed into a brick wall called reality. You remember being that bold young graduate ready to tackle the business world, don't you? Suddenly you learned that the university “forgot” to include a lot of courses that are now needed. Why weren't courses taught on writing proposals or contract negotiation? Where was the course on regulatory permitting? And what about the course on billing or collecting on overdue invoices? And where was the course on the efficient use of time? Or what about the course on project management itself?

And... there was no course listed in the requisites for managing a client. Many professionals even today have never learned how to manage a client. However, they may have taken multiple courses on Project Management, but Client Management probably wasn't even mentioned once during the course. But isn't Client Management training just as important as Project Management... if not, more so? Then... how do you manage a project... and the client... simultaneously. After all, doesn't a Project Manager work for... and get paid by... the Client? So, the question remains...how do you manage a client? While the 5-word answer seems simple, it eludes many Project Managers even today. That answer is “By managing the client's needs.”

So... now what does that mean? Well, to manage the client's needs you must understand the project's development process well enough to address potential problems before they occur... and resolve them before they become a problem. And... you must understand how the client operates and what the client needs. And then, meet that need before the client even asks.

Now ask yourself another revealing question... how much does your company spend on marketing in an effort to get a new client? And how many clients must you submit a proposal to before you get a single client... five, ten, twenty, or more? And how much



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time was required to prepare each proposal for each of those prospective clients? Did you have to make a presentation regarding your company's qualifications and experience? How far did you have to travel and how many trips did you make trying to obtain just one project? It's shocking how much **each** client actually costs the company!

So, once you get a new client and a new project, what are you going to do to keep the client? What about your other clients? What are you doing to keep your current clients? You do have more than one client, right? So, how do you juggle multiple clients simultaneously? And... what does client management even mean?

This course...

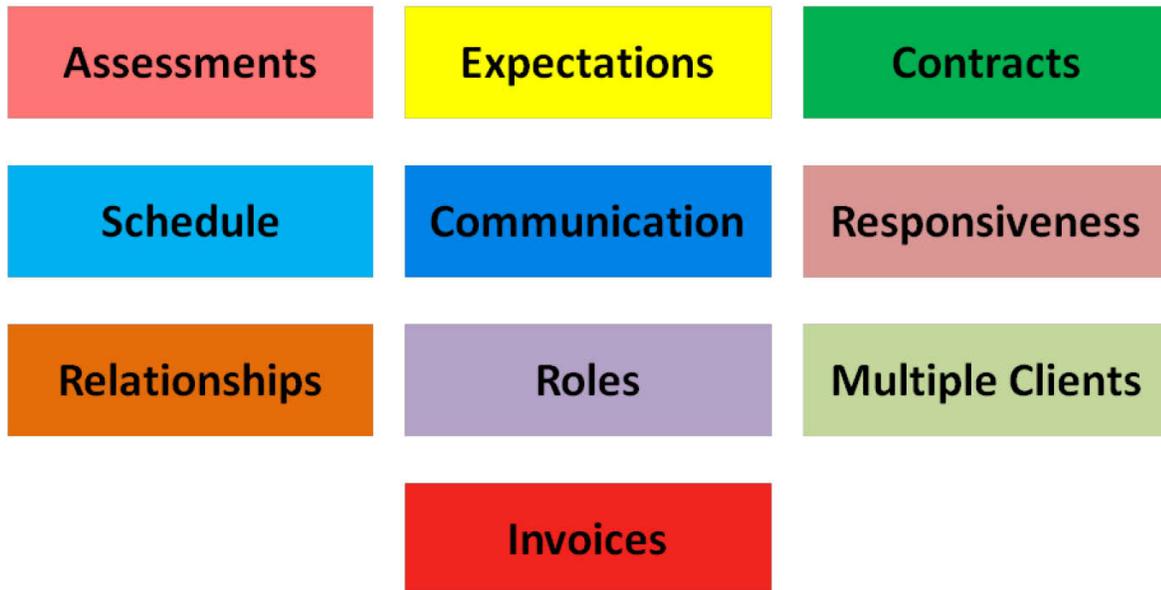
There are many courses available from multiple sources that present information on Project Management. However, most don't consider the client in the management process. They, for whatever reason, ignore the fact that not all clients are the same. Clients vary... some are new to development and some have extensive development experience. Some develop residential properties, others commercial, industrial, medical or research, and some others develop resorts. Some clients are micro-managers and will want to know everything that is happening with their projects on as near a real-time basis as possible. Some are only concerned with specific milestones in the project, while others simply want to know when they can begin using the project. And the list continues.... How you manage the project... and manage your client... will largely determine *IF* your client will be using you for another project... provided, of course, *this* project is completed successfully.

Ask yourself now... Do you really know what your clients want or do you only "*think*" you know? Do you know what your clients expect from you? If you don't know what they truly want or what they expect, how can you meet or exceed their expectations? If you can't manage the project to the satisfaction of your clients, how can you expect to keep your clients coming back? This course will cover the various topics that need to be addressed in order to successfully manage a project through managing your clients. These topics are listed below:



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While the above list may imply a logical linear sequence, it is primarily a holistic approach to management. Not addressing any one of these essential elements throughout the project design and construction can result in less than desirable outcomes which will reflect poorly on you and, possibly, your company. All of these elements are equally important and need to be addressed satisfactorily to successfully keep a client and have him willing to recommend you to *your future clients*. And that's the ultimate goal... to get *good* clients without having to constantly be searching for the next one.



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Assessments

For all new projects and new clients, begin by making the following assessments:

Assess the project: The client's project is the goal, but if you can't properly design the client's project, it doesn't matter who the client is. Obviously, a shopping center requires a different approach than a residential subdivision. Likewise, a 20-story high-rise is considerably different than a warehouse building. Carefully consider the project type, the scope of work required, the disciplines that will be needed, and the experience of your staff and/or sub-consultants that you have available to work on this project.

Assess yourself: Assess your personal experience with this type of project. How much experience do you *really* have for the project being proposed? Every project is different even if it's the same type of project. Think about it... the client is different, the location is different, the topography is different, the surrounding properties are different, the vegetation is different, the regulatory jurisdiction is different, and the list goes on. You may have some experience with this type of project but do you have the right experience and do you have enough experience to properly manage *this project*? (Depending on your self-assessment, you may need to defer this project to another project manager and take the opportunity to learn from someone more experienced.)

Then ask yourself what assistance will be needed from others? If you don't have the necessary disciplines within your company, can you get reliable assistance from other sub-consultants? Do they have the available man-power to meet your deadlines? Even if you have the expertise within your company, are they really available to focus on the project? Do they have the time to dedicate to your project and to your deadlines? If you're using sub-consultants for certain disciplines, do you have sufficient funding to use them?

Assess the client: No two clients are the same. Some are experienced and understand the funding requirements, development timelines, permitting requirements, zoning requirements, construction schedules, and construction costs required to complete a project. Some clients only have limited experience with some of the



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necessary requirements. Then there are those that only “*think*” they understand how to develop... but they really don’t... even though they may have the funding needed to complete a project. And, to make matters even worse, they don’t want you to know they don’t know! And that’s a dangerous client.

To assess a new client, research what you can about the client’s company and background. Has the client’s company ever developed a project similar to what is being asked of you to design? What was their previous experience with these projects? Where were their previous projects located... in the same city, the same state, in this country, international...?

Then, given what you find out, the next question is “Are you a good fit for the client?” Do you understand the project requirements and what the client expects? What is the expected duration of your services for the project? Can you, and are you willing, to meet their requirements and their expectations?

First contact: If you’re satisfied with your research of the client’s background and you feel your company is a good fit for the project, then set up a meeting with the client... either at your office or theirs. Your office will provide you the opportunity to introduce them to your company, your staff, the services you can provide, and some of the projects you have previously completed. Whereas, meeting at their office provides you an insight to their company, staff, and their completed projects.

This first meeting is an opportunity to shine or to embarrass yourself *and* your company. First impressions... good or bad... may be difficult to overcome and may take more time than the client is willing to take. So prepare yourself for this first meeting. Know what you want to say, what you’re going to ask, and how much time you have for this meeting.

And most importantly... be professional. Be on time, be prepared, be respectful of the client’s time, answer the client’s questions, get your questions answered, and then end the meeting on schedule.

True story... Once, as a client, I was scheduled for a meeting in another city at a prospective consultant’s office to discuss a new project. However, the person I was to meet was out of town when I arrived at his office and the receptionist was scurrying around trying



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to find someone to meet with me. I ended up leaving the office without speaking a word. The person I was to meet had made three critical mistakes... he went out of town when he had a scheduled meeting with me, he didn't notify me or attempt to reschedule prior to my travel, and he didn't even bother to provide a qualified replacement for my meeting. He called a few days later and wanted to know when we could meet again... without any apologies or explanations for missing the previous meeting. So I politely told him I had already selected another company. But in truth, because of his actions, he wasn't someone I was willing to hire. He obviously wasn't "professional" and he certainly didn't understand even the basics of "Client Management".

During the first meeting, allow the client to describe the project and what services are needed from you. You may be able to provide services X, Y, and Z, but if the client only wants X and Y from you then don't waste the client's time by trying to convince him to obtain Z. You may inform him that many clients ask you to provide Z, but don't push it. Or you might ask who will be providing the Z services since you will need to coordinate with those providing those services. In doing so, you are being respectful of the decisions the client has made and showing that you are a team player... both of which are good things. Additionally, you may find that the firm providing the Z services could end up leading you to other new projects.

Also, during this first meeting ask questions relevant to the project and ask who will be representing the client. Remember, this is your chance to get the answers you need to prepare your company's proposal for the project and to begin developing a rapport with the client.

At a minimum, you need answers to the following before you prepare a proposal:

1. How knowledgeable is the client with the services being requested? An experienced client should become part of the team and can help you keep the project profitable and on schedule. An inexperienced client will require more time from you to communicate and educate him every step of the way. So you will need to allocate additional time and money for an inexperienced client.
2. Specifically define the project.
3. Specifically define the services being provided.



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4. Specifically define any services that might be needed but AREN'T INCLUDED in the contracted scope of services.
5. Specifically define any services that you will need to sub-contract to other consultants. Don't lead the client to believe that all services are being provided "in-house" if they're not.
6. Specifically define the expected schedule and list all hard deadlines.
7. Specifically define the payment schedule. Also, include rates for any additional reimbursable expenses, administrative fees, etc.

Note the word "specifically" is used multiple times in the list of items to be included in the contract. There's a reason for that.... Remember, any misunderstandings about work scope and fees later may cause much ill-will that could have been avoided from the start and could kill any chances of adding a repeat client. So, be specific in both services and fees.



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Expectations

Do you think your client has any expectations of you and his project? Well, do you have any expectations of your support staff? Of course you do... and so does your client of you. How are you going to know what those expectations are? Are you going to guess, assume you know, or just hope that it doesn't become a problem?

Ask: The quick answer to the question of a client's expectations is usually "They want it cheap, fast, and good." So, if a potential client were to actually say that to you today, how would you respond? Really... Stop and think about it right now. What would be your response? What would you say? Are you stumped and searching for a response? A delayed response also says something. And even saying nothing is saying a lot to the client. Either of these two responses is telling the client he has the upper hand simply because it reveals you don't have enough prior experience with clients or projects to respond promptly. A seasoned Project Manager already understands the relationships of those three expectations. So should you.

Obviously, the best way to determine the client's expectations for the project is to simply ask. But do you know what to ask? For every new project... regardless of whether it's a new client or an existing client... you should always ask the following three questions:

1. ***What is the client's anticipated schedule for design, permitting, and construction?*** Based on your experience, is the client's schedule reasonable with your staff's current workload... AND... the current regulatory approval requirements? If not, can the client extend the schedule appropriately?
2. ***What is the client's budget for the development's construction?*** (Make sure the client isn't including design and permitting costs in the construction budget. You'll discuss your design fees later.) Is the client's budget reasonable? If not, what is the client's response to learning that the project isn't sufficiently funded? At this point, you may want to withdraw your company from the client's consideration. After all, do you really want to work on a project and not get paid for your time and expenses? As for me, I've had all the "practice" projects I need. If I'm going to do the work, I expect to be paid for my work... upon completion... not months or years later, if ever.



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3. ***How closely is the client going to be involved in the project development?***

Will his involvement be very limited... basically reviewing your monthly invoice and making an occasional phone call? Will the client be moderately involved and expect notifications of completed milestones? Or, will the client be extensively involved and expect to approve all actions and personally make all of the key project decisions? Will there be regularly scheduled meetings... bi-weekly, monthly, or quarterly? Where will the meetings occur... in your office, his office, out of town, or out of state? Who is expected to attend the meetings... you, your staff, your sub-consultants, or even contractors?

At a minimum, you need to understand the client's expectations for the project in every stage of the project development and maintain the necessary communications at a frequency appropriate for the level of work being conducted. Then recognize that it will likely change during the life of the project, perhaps multiple times.



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CHEAP, FAST, AND GOOD

Choices... Choices... Choices.... When it comes to providing services, including professional services, there are three choices available for clients: Cheap, Fast, and Good. A good Project Manager understands that clients are only allowed to choose two of the three. For example, if the client chooses Cheap and Fast, it won't be Good. And if he chooses, Fast and Good, it won't be Cheap. Likewise, if he chooses Cheap and Good, it won't be Fast. If he chooses all three... well, he will likely get none of the three and you will likely need... and should get... another client.

Let's now look at each of these more closely as it relates to professionals and clients...

Cheap – Everybody loves getting a great product cheaply. But what does that really mean? If you buy a cheap car, what did you really get? It's probably not new, it's probably not in good condition, and it may not be reliable. But because it's cheap, you don't have high expectations and you know that disappointments and/or problems are to be expected. But those expectations aren't going to prevent you from getting upset



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when you need to drive to a meeting and your car won't start! Right...? So even though you knew it might not be reliable, you're still upset.

However, when we consider professional services, a cheap design could mean you lose your license to practice or, worse yet, someone gets killed. As it relates to professional services, even the cheap design is still expected to meet state professional standards... after all, the design was completed by a licensed professional. So, where does "Cheap" come into the picture? For a professional, with good design principles as a requirement, one way you can reduce the fee is by extending the project completion date such that you can work on the project during the "slow" times in your weekly/monthly/yearly schedule. Alternatively, you might reduce the scope of work and also require the client to be responsible for portions of the work...or you might reduce the number of alternatives being evaluated... or you might reduce the size of the first phase of work, etc. Regardless of the process selected, for the design professional "Cheap" relates to price only... but it *does not mean* deviating from recognized sound design practices. After all, as professionals, we are dealing with public health and safety, right? Then think about how much sympathy you're going to get from your state licensing board when you're brought up on charges....? Still want to do a "cheap" project?

Something to think about... If the client insists on cheap everything, do you really want him as a client? If the client is that cheap, you can expect your payments to be infrequent, partially paid, or never paid. Or did you just want to get some more "practice" designing a project anyway? Additionally, if the client has a reputation for being cheap, that reputation is going to be transferred to you... and your company as well. So, can you really afford a "cheap" client?

Fast – Everybody understands being fast. And, in today's society, everybody wants everything done fast... the client, the owner/President/CEO, the Project Manager, the supervisor, etc. While being fast can mean larger profits, it can also lead to a faster disaster if something critical is overlooked. Many project managers totally skip a peer review (aka Quality Assurance / Quality Control... or QA/QC review... in order to deliver a product early or to meet a deadline. But, in doing so, aren't they really gambling that they won't overlook a serious flaw? And, then what...? You've heard the statement "There's never enough time to do it right, but there is always time to do it again." Never skip your QA/QC review.



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For proper client management, “Fast” requires immediate responses from the client to the professional. Delayed responses cost time and money. Make sure the client understands this aspect especially for those times that the client is insisting on a fast delivery schedule. This means the client must be available at all times... including early mornings, late nights, weekends or any time that the professional is needing to work for that quickly approaching deadline. So, if you’re going to be working nights or weekends, you must advise the client that you may need him available during those hours. If the client isn’t available, you MUST document the fact that the client delayed you by X days.

Example...If you advised the client of your intended work schedule and then need an answer on a Friday afternoon but the client doesn’t respond until Monday afternoon, you need to inform him that he caused you a 4-day delay since you couldn’t work Friday, Saturday, Sunday, or Monday until he responded. When you’re working on a “Fast Track” schedule, every day may be a work day. And I’m sure you know what it’s like to work nights and weekends to meet a hard deadline. Likewise, if you’re the Project Manager and your staff is working nights or weekends, you’ve got to make yourself available to answer questions for them... promptly, too. After all, you’re paying them overtime for those additional hours.

“Fast” also requires frequent meetings by staff, the client, or both. The meetings are needed to ensure the project is always headed in the right direction. You can’t afford for staff to be spending time working on a phase of work that is unacceptable to the client. So, you need the staff meetings to track where the project is headed, the schedule, and the costs. And you also need the meetings with the client to confirm that what is being worked on meets the client’s expectations or vision for the project.

“Fast” can be a viable option but it requires the necessary manpower and efficient time management. And it usually requires working nights, weekends, and holidays to perform the work... and the QC reviews... correctly and by the deadline. So “Fast and Cheap” isn’t going to be an acceptable combination if you have to pay for overtime hours to get it completed correctly, professionally, and on schedule.



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Good – Everybody wants “Good”... until they see the price! Whether it be a car, a home, a boat, or whatever... regardless, “Good” is expected to be good. For professional services, “Good” is always expected... and demanded... especially by the State’s professional board. You’re a professional, so deliver a professional product.

That said, everyone makes mistakes, but a professional is expected to minimize those mistakes and make every effort to provide an error-free product. To do this requires experienced, knowledgeable staff, an experienced professional Project Manager, and thorough QC/QA reviews performed by a peer. If any of these three are missing, you can expect some costly mistakes... but then, that’s why you have “Errors and Omissions” insurance, right? However, once you’ve had to use it just one time, your premiums skyrocket and you may find that many insurance companies won’t make it available to you anymore. As a result, you end up paying out of your own pocket or the company’s. And then, how many projects’ profits (and Christmas bonuses) will it take to cover those losses? How pleased will your staff be to lose their bonuses? And your mistakes will likely cost the rest of the company’s staff’s bonuses even if they weren’t involved with your project. How happy will they be with you then?

“Good” takes time to work efficiently and professionally to address all of the issues associated with a project. It takes a lot of effort to *properly* manage, coordinate, develop concepts, provide designs, create construction details, and write specifications. The finished project must comply with all regulatory codes, be constructed within budget and on schedule, and meet the public’s... and client’s... expectations. This is the reputation you want to strive to maintain.



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Contracts

Never start a project without a signed contract or written authorization. Period. This is especially true for a new client that you don't really know. Even if they were referred to you by the best client that you currently have, don't jeopardize the project with your interpretations of his verbal instructions. You don't know the person and he doesn't know you. Neither you nor he "speak the same language" since you just met. For example... he says he has a "big" project. What does that mean? How big is a "big project"? When does a project become big? Is a project with 2 buildings a big project? What if it's in New York's Times Square? Or... is a 40-lot residential subdivision a big project? What about a 2,500-lot residential development? A project you consider small may be a really large project for that new client.

And the same goes with contracts. For example...

A new client says he wants you to start on a new commercial shopping center immediately; he provides you the property address, the building size, etc. and says he'll meet you again in three weeks and review what you've prepared. So... being the great project manager that you are... you start work on a design immediately just as he instructed. Three weeks later, you provide him your initial designs and you have a contract ready for his signature. He looks at you with a blank stare and then says he never authorized you to start designing the project. You then remind him that he said for you start immediately so you did. He then corrects you by saying he only authorized you to start on the "contract proposal" immediately... not any design work! Now he's upset and you're upset. That's not a good start to a new project or a new client. Again, never start a project without a signed contract.

Even if a client you've known and worked with for years asks you to start on a new project design immediately, send an email summarizing your understanding of his instructions and ask for a written confirmation before starting any work. It only takes a



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few minutes and once he corrects one of your emails, he'll appreciate it (and you will, too). Remember, clients are *ALWAYS* easier to keep than to acquire.

An alternative to the signed project contract is to obtain an "On-Call Services Contract". Basically, this is a signed contract in which the Client specifically authorizes miscellaneous services at the standard hourly rates. The services are approved through emailed confirmations or other signed authorizations or approvals. In this manner, your services are protected with simple instructions that are signed or authorized through emailed approvals. This can be used to provide contractual protection for any project or service that may be requested by the client.

Once you have a signed contract and the project is under way, if you have a change in the scope of work, get it approved... in writing... with the fee and have it signed by all parties. Even simple misunderstandings can end a relationship with a valuable client simply because you "assumed" you understood what the client wanted.

Do not accept any verbal approvals. And this policy should be stated repeatedly with each new project. Always follow up a client's verbal approvals in writing. Verbal approvals lead to misunderstandings... which lead to friction... which means no new projects. No new projects will lead to looking for new clients and trying to repair a bad reputation because *former clients will talk* and bad news spreads like wildfire among clients *and your competitors*.

The contract should include a description of the project, it's location, the scope of work being contracted, any contractual milestones (if any), the fees (all of them), the client's responsibilities, the agreed upon completion date, and the terms and conditions... or what's known as the "fine print"... language prepared by attorneys for other attorneys. State these items in clear, concise, and definitive terms for the client such that there is no chance of anyone (read "attorneys") being confused about who is responsible for what in the proposed project development. If any services are being omitted but will (or may) be required, state what services are being omitted and note that they will be paid for by the client or handled by someone else, if needed.

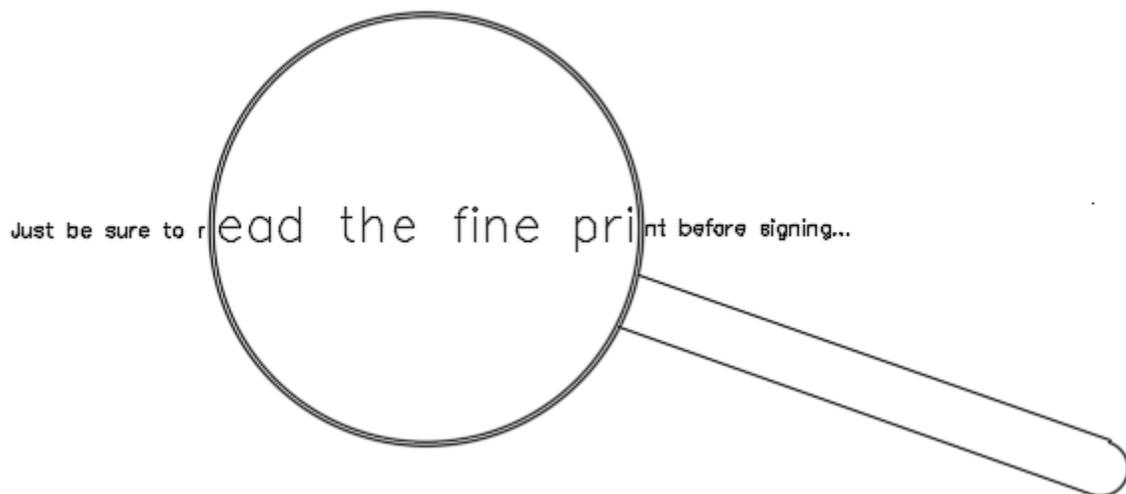
If there is a possibility that the schedule, conditions, or fees are subject to change for whatever reason, state what can change and the process required to change the contract and the delivery dates. For example...



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The Client is responsible for obtaining a property survey in an electronic format by a registered surveyor. Your contract calls for a milestone delivery date of March 1st. Your design work for the milestone requires 3 weeks of work but the survey isn't delivered until February 15th. You really don't want to be penalized for missing a contractual milestone because the Client's surveyor didn't deliver the survey to you in time for you to complete your work by the contracted deadline.

It seems simple and straight-forward... until the attorneys get involved. Did your contract state your work would require 3 weeks after delivery of the survey? Oh, you omitted that statement. Now what are you going to do?

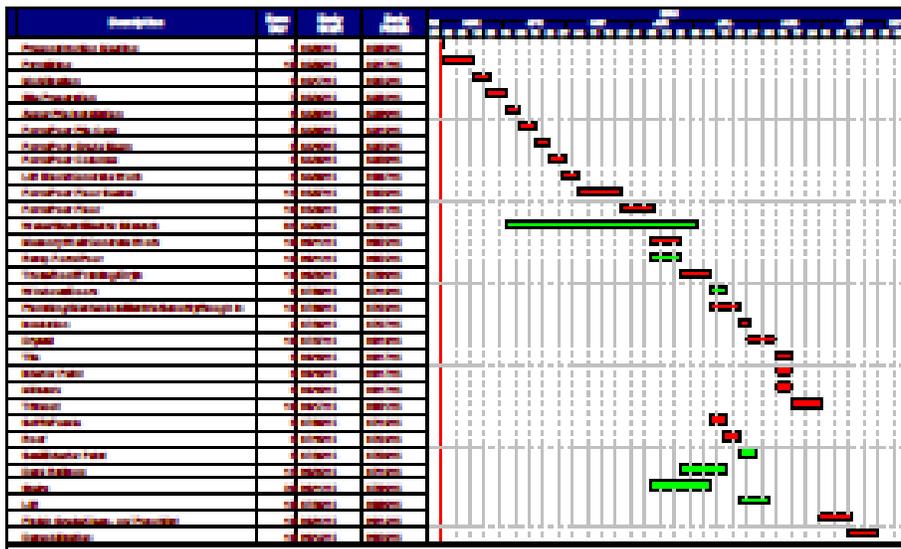




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Schedule

The schedule you worked up when you were preparing your proposal will become a crucial tool for you during the contract life. (You did prepare a schedule when the proposal was prepared, didn't you? At least, nod your head in the affirmative so we can continue.) At this point, the client already knows what your design fees will be but your ability to keep to the schedule is still in question. So the schedule is what the Client will be using to evaluate your performance and capabilities. If you're a day late, he will know it since he has been waiting for the next set of deliverables for review because he (if he is working for a large corporation) will be questioned about the project at the next board meeting. And he obviously doesn't want to report that he doesn't know if the project is on schedule or not at that board meeting. But, if you've conducted your project management properly, you've already been updating the client regularly before each milestone is reached.



The project schedule will become your best friend to keep you out of trouble with the client and with your company. But you'll need to provide the schedule to your staff and to any sub-consultants working for you or with you. Then at your regularly scheduled



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project team meetings, have all disciplines provide a report with their progress documents or plans. This meeting may occur the day before you provide your regular report to the client or it may occur just prior to an emailed weekly or bi-weekly progress update.

If possible, always invite the client to attend the regularly scheduled team meetings. Having the client attend each team meeting has multiple benefits. First, the client's presence is a strong motivator for each member of the team. If it's important enough for the client to attend the progress meeting, it will be more important to the team members to attend and for them to complete their work on schedule. Secondly, if an issue arises during a team meeting, the client may be able to provide guidance immediately and thereby avoid any unnecessary delays... and unnecessary delays are called losses in profit. Thirdly, the client can take an active role in the project design by providing guidance and suggestions of what he would prefer for his project. He can also observe your performance as the project manager, your management skills, your organizational skills, the value of having your prior experience to guide the team, and he can evaluate the design team you have assembled for his project.

Use the approved schedule to track each discipline's progress and if someone falls behind, emphasize that the delay is unacceptable and the impacts that this delay has on the rest of the team. Then remind him that he is behind his agreed upon schedule (since he helped develop the schedule) and then ask for a date... a specific date... that he will be back on schedule. You need to determine quickly what is needed to get back on track, who is doing what and when, and give all of the team members an opportunity to state the impact the delay may have on their schedules. You will need their information to revise the project schedule. Also, inform all of them that they should notify you whenever they discover they are behind schedule and what they are going to do to get back on track rather than waiting until the team meeting to inform you. And these actions are especially needed if the client is attending the meeting in person or via a teleconference call.

If the client isn't attending the meeting, use the answers from the team to find out if it's possible to get back on the original schedule. If not, determine the actual delay prior to notifying the client in person and then follow up in writing. Once the delay has been accepted by the client (at whatever cost is negotiated), send the revised schedule to each team member and a copy to the client.



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If you find yourself ahead of schedule, revise the schedule to reflect the new delivery dates but... initially send this revised schedule only to the design team. Don't send it to the client until you are certain. When you speak to the client, only inform him that you *HOPE* to deliver the project ahead of schedule but you won't know until the project is nearly completed. Why? Because if there is an unavoidable delay later, the client won't be upset that you're not meeting the revised schedule dates because he never received it. You only told him that you *MIGHT* be delivering the project earlier than planned. You didn't commit to an earlier date. Whereas, if you sent a revised schedule to the client, it will be like that new date was etched in stone. The client has likely already notified his partners and set in motion for an earlier "Grand Opening". So, don't allow your client to become embarrassed because you put him in a bad spot with his company because of your early project delivery announcement. Even if you still finish the project by the originally scheduled delivery date, you will still look bad because you got the client's expectations raised and then didn't deliver. So, wait until the project delivery date is guaranteed before you announce an early finish. Then, you will look good and your client will look good.

There's another reason to not jump the gun if you think you're ahead of schedule. It may be that some of the other team members are already committed on other projects and can't revise their schedules to start working earlier than originally planned on your project. So if you notify the client that you're ahead of schedule and then find out a few days later that your staff can't commit to that earlier schedule, you're going to appear unreliable.



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Communication

How important is communication? ***All good project managers have learned that communication is critical for a successful project.*** Did you ever try communicating with someone telepathically? How well did it work? Not so good, right? That's especially true in dealing with clients and with the staff working with you or for you. A successful Project Manager must communicate clearly and frequently with clients and staff. Let's discuss the three crucial aspects of communication for successful Project Management.

1. Single Point of Contact: Part of communicating clearly is communicating with the correct person. One reason why many Project Managers struggle... they're talking with the wrong person about the wrong issues but don't realize it since they don't have a single Point of Contact with their client. This is why it is absolutely crucial to establish a single Point of Contact with the client. Projects that are managed by committees always end up with delays, cost overruns, and finger-pointing. If a "committee" is providing an answer, it may take days, weeks, or months for the group to get together to make a decision. Those are delays that can be costly to a project in time, money, or both.

Have the client provide a Single Point of Contact that you will be reporting to, obtaining answers from, and who will be informing the others in the client's company. Be emphatic that nothing will be acted upon until the Point of Contact provides written instructions. That written instruction provides you and the client with a documented history of the choices, decisions, and dates of what happened, when, and by whom... which eliminates the finger-pointing if things unravel.

If the client can't be the day-to-day Point of Contact, have him select someone with the authority to make decisions quickly and has the spending authority to back up those decisions. You now know who you report to and who to contact for answers. And you know that the Point of Contact understands the project and the ramifications of any decisions made. Any instructions that are received from someone other than the designated Point of Contact becomes only a suggestion until confirmed by your contact person.



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2. Appropriate Communication: Communication must be appropriately handled through verbal discussions or written documents. But do you know which you should use when? Generally, only items of a general nature should be handled through verbal communication. Sometimes, the verbal discussions must be followed up in writing. Action items must always be handled in writing.

Verbal communication is easily misunderstood and, therefore, potentially dangerous. How so? If someone says... "This pump will cost a lot." How much do you think the pump will cost? What is "a lot" anyway? Is the pump going to be more than a \$100, more than a \$1,000, or more than \$10,000? When speaking, speak clearly, say what you mean, and mean what you say such that everyone listening understands what you intended.

Never say "*I don't know*" and then stop talking. You're the project manager and you're being paid to be a professional consultant. If you don't know then say... "*I don't know right now but I'll find out and will let you know tomorrow.*" If pressed for an immediate answer, then say "*I think it may be _____ but as I stated, I will need to confirm it.*" And then actually find out, confirm it, and report back... in writing.

Written communication is your friend. It may be a pain to do but it will save you more time... and conflict... than not putting the facts in writing. But the good news is that the written communication doesn't need to be all that time-consuming. So, what needs to be in writing? Basically, any decision that affects the project, who made the decision, when the decision was made, and any costs associated with the decision (if available), need to be provided as project updates on a regular basis.



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What is a regular basis? That depends on the project and the client preferences. Some projects may need a weekly update, others a bi-weekly update, or possibly as a monthly update. Certainly, no longer than a monthly update since that will likely coincide with your monthly billing cycle. Step into your client's shoes... since you (the client) are going to be paying someone a lot of money each month, do you really care what your consultant is doing each month? Do you really care what is happening with your project? Are you curious about how your money is being used? Of course, the answers are yes, yes, and yes! Well, if you would want to know, then your client will want to know. So... let him know... and on a regular basis. If you're not sure how often your client would like to know what's happening, simply ask him.

Then, once you say you're going to provide the updates on a weekly/bi-weekly/monthly basis, ensure you do it! Nothing says more about you as a project manager to a client than saying you're going to do something and then not doing it. Take this task seriously. Let your client know you take him and his project seriously and that his project is very important to you.

As for the update format, one of the preferred formats is an email with bullet points. It is easily reviewed, provides the facts without a lot of verbiage, and if the clients have questions, they can call or email back asking for clarification. Also, using a bullet point format, takes very little time to complete... especially in an email. And, you can sequentially number each update. Since you should keep a copy of each update, you can "Reply All" on the previous emailed update which allows you to review the previous update for unfinished business and then add new update items. And numbering the updates emphasizes to the client that you have been providing regular updates for a substantial time, that you're organized, and that you're not likely forgetting any unfinished business. If you do have any unfinished tasks, provide in your update that the tasks remain incomplete and that you are still working on them.

Addressing Issues: Addressing the project issues is important in every update. And the issues need to be listed first since the client may not read the entire email. Assuming there is an issue that needs to be addressed, you would note it at the beginning of the update. The issues/alerts/action items requiring the client's attention need to be where they will be noticed... and not buried in the text somewhere below on the page. State what the problem is, what the urgency is, what the possible solutions are, and what your recommendation is. *Always provide your recommendation.* Remember, you're the client's consultant... his expert... so do your job. Making his job



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easier will help you stand out from the other consultants he has used in the past and *make him want to use you on his future projects.* (This is free marketing so use it!)

Addressing Potential Concerns: Addressing any potential concerns is also important in every update. Advising the client of potential pitfalls early helps you and the client avoid unnecessary delays or costs. You want to alert the client of a potential concern but not alarm him. Remember, you're advising him of concerns you may encounter early enough to avoid them by taking action now if needed. So, don't scare your client about something that "might" happen. The concerns listed in your updates are to help your client avoid problems and show your client that you're looking ahead in the project rather than putting out fires that could have been avoided. Again, for any potential concerns you have, provide guidance that your client can use to avoid these problems. If you do take action and avoid the concern you noted previously, update the client that you have successfully addressed it and no further action by the client is needed... making his job easier.

Proofread: Again, in all of your written correspondence, say what you mean and mean what you say. And... re-read what you wrote before you email it or send it. It's easy to lose your train of thought while writing the update because of distractions from phone calls, someone walking into your office, meetings, etc. So proofread your update looking for clear, concise, and complete updates without any typos, misspellings, or other "unprofessional" mistakes. If needed, have one of your peers or staff review what you have written. You'll be surprised at how many mistakes you, or they, may find in your own emails and correspondence.

A successful Project Manager must master the communication skills required to manage a client and a project from start to finish. Otherwise, you will be no different from the other "ordinary" project managers the client has encountered previously. And in today's economy, you need to be the first Project Manager that comes to the Client's mind when he has a new project.



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Responsiveness

How important is responsiveness? How important is it to you when you have a question about a bill you received for personal work done for you? Does it bother you if you don't receive a prompt response to your inquiries? Absolutely it does! Well the same goes for your clients. If you receive a phone call, an email, or a message, respond as quickly as you can... even if it is only to say you received the request and you're researching the question now. You're a professional, right? Then respond like a professional. Be timely with your response, accurate in your response, and be professional.

Being Prompt

True story... I've been told by many of my clients that some consultants are slow to respond or never respond! One client actually told me about a situation that happened to him. He said he spent a couple of weeks trying to reach a project manager by phone, voicemail, and then email. Once he finally caught up with him, the project manager informed the client that he hadn't responded because the client's question didn't deserve a reply and he would return calls to the client when the client had a question that warranted his time to respond! Unbelievable! How do you think the client responded? Correct. The company was fired the very next day. Then the Project Manager's boss called to find out why the company had been fired. When the company's owner learned the reason, he tried to have another project manager assigned, but the client refused. The client said he told the owner he didn't have time to train the owner's staff and that the owner obviously didn't even know his own staff well enough to know who was capable of project management. The result... another client lost.

You've probably heard similar stories. If you're going to be a good project manager, you must be responsive to the client's needs... even if you think the request is unimportant or even stupid. That's why you're being paid to be a consultant. And you are a Professional, aren't you? If the client had all of your knowledge, why would he need you?



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Relationships

How well have you gotten to know your Client? Think about one of your clients for a minute. How long have you known the client? And in that time, how often are you in contact with him... either socially or professionally? Why do I ask? Because trust is built on a relationship whether it be social or professional. If all you know about a client is his name and the name of his company, you will likely lose the client once the project is completed.

So how do you develop a relationship with your clients? A frequent but short phone conversation is a good start. Initially, you can use the client's project as your reason for calling and allow the topics to get side-tracked. If the client is a private sector client, perhaps invite him to a business lunch or to a ball game or any activity that may be of interest to him. Approaching holidays are a good time to demonstrate your appreciation of his business and of him.

A public sector client can be much more difficult to develop a relationship with because of ethics regulations and competitive bidding requirements. However, business meetings at the office, his or yours, is still acceptable if it is project related. During those meetings, express your willingness to provide free advice or free information anytime he may have a question in your area of expertise. But be particularly careful to not offend or appear to bribe him. That can quickly lead to distrust, suspicions, misconceptions, and then trouble.

For both private sector and public sector clients, return their calls as quickly as possible. Don't wait until the next day or after lunch or whenever. Do it immediately, even if you must leave a voicemail at the end of the day. Let the client know that you responded as quickly as you could. This one small courtesy shows how much you truly value him as a client and his project. If each client feels that he is your most important client, this will go a long way to securing future projects from him. Again, think of it as free marketing if you want.



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Also, recognize that it is easier to lose a client's trust than it is to earn it. And if the trust is lost, so is the relationship. Always provide accurate information and answers in a timely manner that the client can use. If the client can't feel that he can trust you, your relationship is going to be rocky at best.



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Roles

How well do you understand your role in the Client's project? How well do you understand the roles of the other parties in the project... the Client, your staff, your sub-consultants, the contractors, and any others? If you don't understand your role or the roles of the others, how can you properly perform your role as the Project Manager? Let's look at the different parties and their roles.

The Client's role is the financier and project visionary. He makes the funding decisions because it's the Client's money and he decides how the finances will be spent. The Client also is the project visionary. The Client understands what he wants the project to become, where the project is being constructed, and he has selected the key members to transform the vision into a reality. And, most importantly, the Client knows what he expects of each key member of the development team... even if that team is only you! That said... *your client* could be another consultant that is working for *The Client*.

The Project Manager's role is implementing your client's vision. How the Project Manager makes that happen is dependent on what your client has assigned as your responsibility. Can you clearly define your responsibility for the project? If you are going to be an effective Project Manager, *you must first identify your client, your role, and the scope of work for which you are responsible*. Hopefully, the scope of work has been well defined within your contract. That being said... if the scope of work isn't clearly defined, you're headed for a "train wreck"! How can you be a successful Project Manager if you don't know what your scope of work is, the schedule, or the budget? Ultimately, the Project Manager's goal is to make the client... *look good*. If you make the client look good, you're well on the way to your next project with him.

The Support Staff's role is to implement the Project Manager's scope of work. The support staff may be direct employees in your company or they may be sub-consultants reporting directly to the Project Manager. Ultimately, their goal should be to make you... the Project Manager... look good. If your support staff makes you look good, you're going to want to use the same staff again. And, if not, you're going to need to find a better support staff.



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Just like you reporting to your client, your support staff needs to report to you on a regular basis. How often should they report to you? That depends on the complexity of the project, the interaction needed with other support staff outside of your office, and the type of interaction needed by you. But, at the very least, they need to report to you a few days prior to your report going to the client. However, you may need weekly meetings... perhaps every Monday morning, or bi-weekly, or the first Thursday of each month. Use whatever works best for your management style and the project. Remember to meet as often as necessary to ensure your staff understands what they need to be working on that week... especially if they are working on multiple projects for multiple Project Managers.

Meetings: For efficiency sake, using the same agenda structure for the meetings will help you have a more efficient meeting. Obviously, the agenda needs to include an update from each discipline of the project team. That update will include the status of the tasks from the previous week, what the focus is for this week, any impacts to the schedule, any issues that need to be coordinated with other disciplines, the next upcoming schedule deadline, and a statement that they are on schedule (good), ahead of schedule (excellent), or behind schedule (not good).

As discussed previously, always have the staff bring hard copies of their current work plans to every meeting. The importance of having your staff bring their current plans is three-fold. First, it keeps your staff focused on the project schedule. It's very embarrassing to bring a set of plans that haven't change since the last meeting. No one wants to admit in front of the client (if present) or the Project Manager, or the other team members that he hasn't even worked on the project since the last meeting.

Secondly, it gives you the opportunity to verify the project progress. Seeing the plans will give you the opportunity to verify the staff's work effort against the recorded work hours. Are they on the right track or are they doing something that is unacceptable to the client? Are they being efficient with their time? Did they charge 80 hours of effort but only make a couple of minor corrections? How will you know if you haven't seen their work? Have them bring their most recent plans every time.

Thirdly, it gives the other disciplines a chance to discover potential conflicts in the design early enough to make timely corrections with minimal lost effort. And, once again, that will help you avoid the "There's never enough time to do it right, but there's always time to do it again!" discussions with your client, or your boss, or your staff.



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Multiple Clients

For Project Managers, properly managing a client and a project is a time-consuming process. It becomes even more difficult when managing multiple clients with multiple projects. So, it's extremely important to efficiently use your time to manage both the client and the project. This includes your emails to each client and to your staff at the project meetings for the multiple clients.

Emails: For a client with multiple projects, always be specific about which project you're discussing. Likely, your client has multiple projects with multiple consultants. So don't assume the client will automatically know which project you're referencing in your email. The email Subject line should clearly state the Project Name and topic the email deals with. The only time a single email should include more than one project is when *the client requests a single email* with the "big picture" update of all his projects that you're managing for him. Otherwise, only deal with one project in each email with the Subject line clearly stating the project name... and location, if dealing with a client that has projects in multiple cities or states.

When sending an email that includes multiple projects, highlight the project being discussed in bold letters and then provide the details as shown below:

To: George Washington

Subject: Bi-Weekly update of Hawk's Landing and Beachside Medical Center

Hawk's Landing Subdivision: The County Planning Commission approved the Master Site Development Plan at the meeting Monday night.

Beachside Medical Center: The revised set of mechanical plans for the Center were shipped to you yesterday for delivery today. Please confirm receipt for our records.



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Using this method provides the client a quick clear update and if he's looking for a particular project, he doesn't have to read the entire email to find the information he's looking for.

A good habit is to send an update after each project's staff meeting. Even if the client attends the meeting, send a written project update and then note that the client attended in person or by phone. If questions arise later concerning a decision made at a one of the project meetings, there is a record of who made the decision, why the decision was made, when it occurred, and that the client was in agreement with the decision at that time.

Schedule: It's important to develop a typical weekly schedule for your client management. If you don't already have a regular schedule, develop one that works for you and then modify it as needed to meet the needs of all your clients and then for your staff. Try to schedule a "Client Day" or a "Client Half-Day" to focus almost exclusively on each particular client. Some clients prefer updates at the first of the week so they can update their investors or partners. Others may want updates at the end of the week to track your progress that week. As an example, your schedule might look something like this:

Monday:	8a	Office staff meeting
	10a	Project A staff meeting
	11a	Project B staff meeting
	12p	Lunch
	1p	Client #1 updates on Projects A and B
	2p	Project C staff meeting
	3p	Client #2 update on Project C
	4p	Project meeting
Tuesday:	8a	Proposal preparation for potential Client
	10a	Project D staff meeting
	11a	Client #3 update on Project D
	12p	Lunch
	2-5p	Regulatory meetings
Wednesday...		



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Again, establish as much of a regular schedule as you can for each day of the week. Obviously, this schedule will have its interruptions each week but do your best to stick with it. Having a regular schedule will keep you efficient with your time in dealing with your clients, your staff, and your projects. Some of these benefits are:

1. You will know what you need to focus on each day. (It's now a habit... right?)
2. Your staff will know what to expect from you each week and when they will likely have access to you for questions and guidance.
3. Your clients will know when to expect updates from you.
4. You will know which days work best for you to schedule your out-of-office meetings for regulatory meetings, inspections, and marketing.
5. You will know which days work best for you to process the never-ending stacks of paperwork.



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Invoices

Invoicing is another one of those necessary evils that your prestigious university never prepared you for, and now you wonder why not. After all, you were trained to be an engineer, architect, etc... and invoicing is for accountants and bookkeepers... or so you thought. Unfortunately, your accounting staff doesn't understand a thing you do either since they didn't take any of the courses you took at the university. And they don't understand what you and your staff worked on all month. Sure, they have a copy of the contract and the project hours, but that doesn't tell them how much you've completed on each project. So... the invoicing paperwork goes to you. Lucky you!

Well, the same holds true for your client. If you sent him updates, he will have a general idea of what you were doing but probably not the specifics. Since he's not an engineer, he really won't know if the mechanical design is 24% complete or 86% complete by the end of the month... unless you already billed him for 75% last month. So, as he reviews the contract for the Scope of Work and then your invoice, he starts scratching his head trying to figure out why you're invoicing him for as much as you have.

The good news is that the Project Manager understands the invoice. Unfortunately, that's you! So, hopefully, you really do know where you stand with the project and if the project is on budget or... *better yet...* under budget.



From my time as a client for professional services, I was surprised to find that so many of the invoices I received were unacceptable and had to be rejected due to the invoices missing critical information that was required for payment processing. Some of the



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invoices were even missing the consultant's name or the consultant's address. I even received invoices intended for other clients. Others were missing the project name, the description of the work being invoiced, invoice dates, and/or other items. And that lack of attention to detail often made me wonder about the consultant's quality of work and the QA/QC reviews. Not having this information only delays the invoice payment since the client now has to take time out of his busy schedule to contact the Project Manager to obtain the missing information. The Project Manager then has to take time out of his schedule to correct the invoice, print it, and then send it to the client again for another review and approval. This takes time... unnecessary time... for everyone to get the invoice paid. But, hey, if you're not in a hurry to get paid, just disregard this section. Regardless, you're still creating more paperwork for your client to deal with and he really won't appreciate it... but he will remember you for it. And, he can then add one more item to the list of other things that he doesn't like about you. So, do yourself a favor and get it right the first time!

When you submit an invoice, don't just include an invoice full of numbers and an invoice amount. At a minimum you should include the following:

1. The client's name and address
2. The consultant's name, address, and phone number
3. The date the invoice is submitted
4. The contract number or project name
5. The invoice number
6. The time period in which the work was performed
7. An itemized listing of **all** of the project's contracted services and the amounts invoiced for each task that month and the total invoiced to-date... including items not being invoiced that month
8. Also, attach documentation for each of the services being invoiced

For Item 7 above, take a copy of the contract and itemize the entire scope of services that are included in the contract and list them on the invoice. Provide the item number, the description of services, the contracted amount, the percent complete, the total amount earned to date, the amount previously invoiced, and the amount invoiced this month with a total amount due in bold numbers at the bottom of the Item list. Providing all of this information on the invoice the first time will ensure you have all of the necessary information the client needs to get your invoice approved and paid promptly, This will also avoid the annoying phone calls from him for more information so he can



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pay you. If your company's current invoice format doesn't allow for all of this information to be provided, attach a second sheet with the information. Again, the purpose is to get you paid and paid quickly. See the example below:

<u>Item No.</u>	<u>Description of work</u>	<u>Contract Amount</u>	<u>Percent Complete</u>	<u>Amount Earned</u>	<u>Previous Invoice</u>	<u>Current Invoice</u>
1	Preliminary meetings	\$1,500.00	100.0	1,500.00	0.00	1,500.00
2	Develop concepts	\$30,000.00	30.0	9,000.00	3,000.00	6,000.00
3	Develop plans	\$150,000.00	0.0	0.00	0.00	0.00
4...						

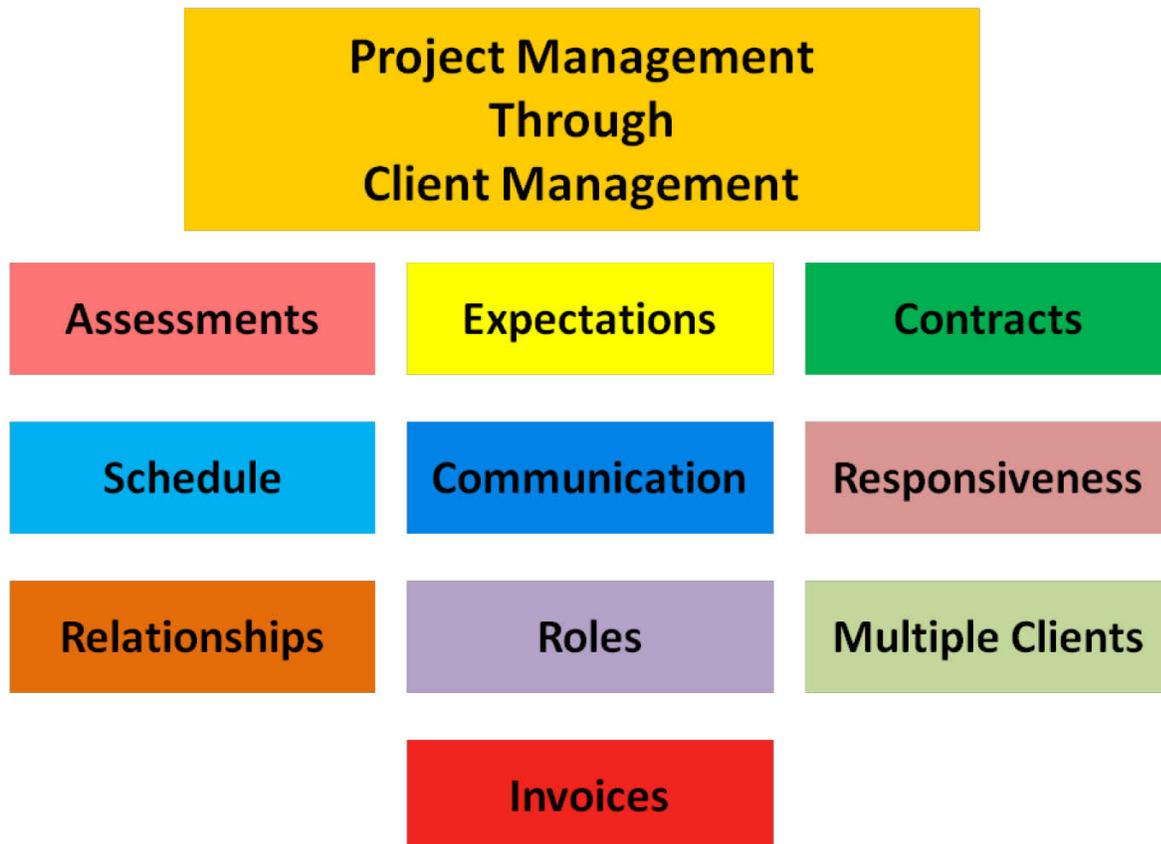
For Item 8 above, provide documentation of the work completed for each line item being invoiced. For example... print progress sets of the plans for work in progress, provide photos of property/building inspections, provide copies of any fees paid on the client's behalf, provide copies of regulatory correspondence, etc. Just don't make the client have to guess at what you did or why you're billing for each of the amounts in the invoice. Think about what you expect to see from one of your sub-consultants or a contractor that wants a payment from you.

Again, your goal should be to make your client's job easier to do and that's what you want to be remembered for. An invoice that has all of the necessary information, is clearly presented in a format that is understandable, and has documentation attached for the amounts invoiced, will be appreciated by your client. And your company will be pleased with the client's prompt payments, too.



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SUMMARY (At long last...)



As we have seen, there are many differences between Project Management and Client Management but the ideal scenario is ***Project Management through Client Management.***

What is your answer to the question “Who is your client?” The correct answer is “Whomever you report to.” That could be your supervisor, a corporate or public department head, the Client, the Owner, or the Client’s Representative. And what is your top priority for your “client”? The answer should always be “To make your client look good.” It’s that simple! If you make your client look good, you have completed



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your work properly and professionally. Because if you haven't completed your work properly and professionally, then there will be mistakes, and these may be potentially costly mistakes, which will not make anyone look good. And as everyone knows, blame always seems to work its way down to your desk.

So as a professional, work efficiently, check your own work, then check it again, and then have someone else check your work before it is released for use. Always keep your client updated on the project status and costs as the project progresses, complete the work on time or... better yet... ahead of schedule, and publicly give the credit to your client. If you make your client look good, you're much more likely to get the next project he has as well, and then the next, and the next.... And by doing this, your reputation will grow and then you'll have new clients that you didn't contact asking you for a proposal on their project. At that point, you'll have an entirely different set of problems... weeding out the clients you *prefer* not to keep. But do it professionally by saying you "currently have too much work to manage the (fired) client's project properly and therefore you just can't take it on at this time." Whatever you do, don't tell the client you're dumping him because "he's too _____ to work with."

Successful ***Project Management Through Client Management*** requires a different mental approach to Project Management. Other professional consultants provide services to development and construction clients in local, state, national, and international locations just as you. Providing the same technical expertise that other professionals provide is only part of the services expected, and demanded, by clients today. So what sets you apart from the others? To successfully compete in today's market requires exceeding the services being provided by your competitors. While they may provide the same technical capabilities as you, are they providing the same level of client services as you? Are you making it easy for clients to select you as the "Go-To" Project Manager? If this is the case, you may find that you have some new clients for life... wherever your career takes you... simply by managing the project through managing the client.