Project Management Tips For Your Small Business

Many small business CEOs share with me a frustration that they have in taking a project from beginning to a successful implementation. Some of this frustration is rooted in the nature of being a small business CEO and not having the time (or maybe the skill) to do this while balancing all the other tasks of just running the business.

Whether you’re running a for-profit or nonprofit business, an ability to organize efforts and initiatives is a necessary skill to achieve success. Effectively executing efforts and accomplishing goals requires planning and coordination among team members (which may be a combination of employees, vendors, suppliers, contractors, etc.).

While some small business owners seem to have a natural knack for project management, it’s not everyone’s strength. Don’t feel defeated if it isn’t yours and you don’t have the resources to hire a professional project manager.

With a process in place to guide you, you, or a designated person from your team, will become more adept at moving projects from start to finish.

I offer the following tips that may help you create a roadmap that you can follow whenever embarking on any new project.

1. Define your goal and get buy-in from all project team members.

As you do this, you will want to determine each team member's role and responsibilities. In this step, also consider how the project will affect your company and how you’ll measure the project’s impact.
2. **Determine the project deliverables.**

What key tasks do team members need to accomplish to move the project along the path to completion? You’ll also need to identify which deliverables depend on other deliverables, so you can establish a timeline that puts tasks in a logical order.

3. **List the resources you will need.**

Assess what you will need regarding budget, person-hours and tools to complete the project.

4. **Set a timeline and identify milestones to mark your progress.**

After knowing what needs to be done and by whom, create target completion dates for your project deliverables. In your timeline, identify interim goals ("milestones") that can serve as major landmarks along the way. As the project progresses, your ability to reach milestones will help you know if you’ll need to adjust your scope, budget or expectations. Milestones also help boost morale as they help project team members see the progress they’ve made.

5. **Define the collaborative process.**

Determine how often your team members will meet as a group to report their progress and share any challenges that might prevent them from fulfilling their deadlines. Schedule your meetings well in advance, so everyone on your team can reserve the dates and times on their calendars.

6. **Select a tool to help you stay organized and keep all project documentation in a single place accessible to all team members.**
A variety of online tools exist that can help you manage projects. Some are more intuitive than others, so assess your team members' comfort level with the technology involved before choosing what you will use. A few examples that might be a good fit for your business include Trello, Evernote, Asana, Dropbox and Google Drive.

Although you might try to save time by skipping some of the initial steps in the process, you should resist that temptation. Successful project management begins with thorough planning. Shortcuts in the beginning could lead to misunderstandings among team members—and missed deadlines.

If you need suggestions on how to manage your projects more efficiently, consider reaching out to SCORE. SCORE mentors have expertise in all aspects of starting and growing a small business, and they can provide you with free guidance as you hone your project management skills.

Dean L. Swanson
Southeast Minnesota SCORE
c/o Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce
220 South Broadway, Suite 100
Rochester, MN 55904
www.seminnesota.score.org/
*Dean is a volunteer Certified SCORE Mentor and former Regional Vice President for the North West Region of SCORE