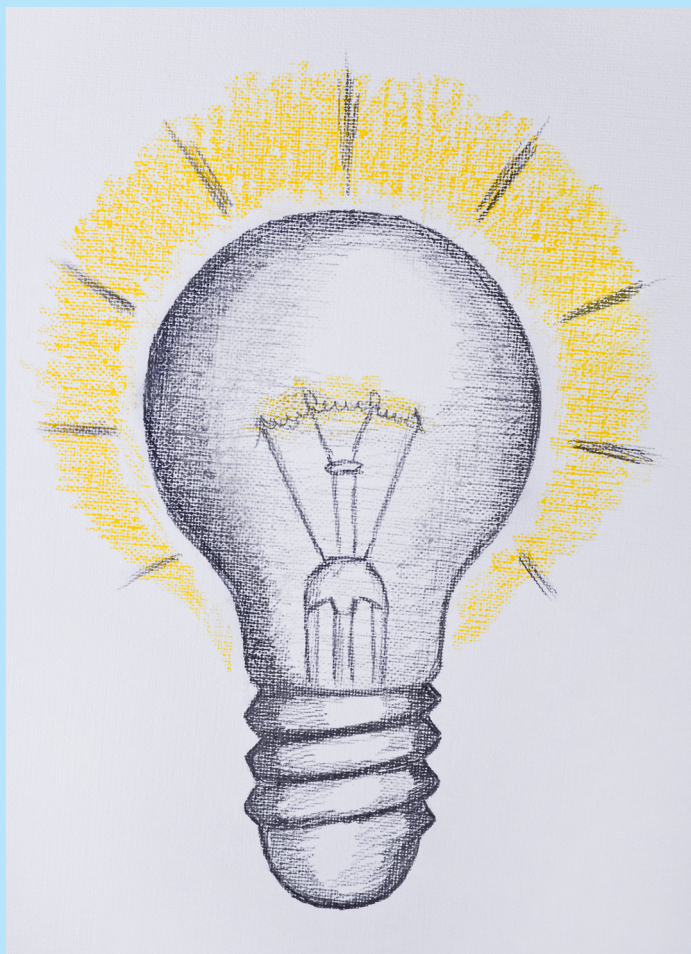


Johanna Rothman

Author of *Manage Your Project Portfolio:
Increase Your Capacity and Finish More Projects*



Project Portfolio Tips: Twelve Ideas for Focusing on the Work You Need to Start & Finish

Project Portfolio Tips

Twelve Ideas for Focusing on the Work You Need to Start & Finish

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This book is for sale at <http://leanpub.com/projectportfoliotips>

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Practical ink

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1. Always Ask the Zeroth Question About Your Projects

Sometimes, you wonder why you are doing this project. You spend all this time on it, you're sure there isn't much value from the project, and still, the project is on the top of your manager's list.

There's a zeroth question you can ask that might help the conversation. The question is this:

“Should We Do This Project at All?”

Sometimes, In the heat of the project portfolio discussion, you, your managers, whomever is discussing the project forgets to ask themselves this question. Now is a good time to remember.

If you are part of a leadership team and you are evaluating the project portfolio, make sure you ask this of each project in the project portfolio. If you are a technical person working on a project you don't think is worth the work, nudge your manager, “Did you ask the Zeroth question?”

If the answer is No, don't worry. It's okay to ask the question now. If the project is not worth doing, stop the project and start something that is worth doing.

If the project is worth doing, great. You can make sure you have everything you need.

That zeroth question is key to managing your personal or corporate project portfolio. It allows you to see if the project is worth your time to do or not do. And, if you are managing your personal project

portfolio it helps you assess whether to do the project at all. To learn more, see [Manage Your Project Portfolio](#).

2. Are You Being Guilted Into Doing More?

Ned, a development manager I know, looked exhausted. “I’m trying to keep development going, and support pre-sales, and support post-sales, and support customer support. When is my group supposed to have time to do development??”

He has a point. If his team does all the nice-guy work, they don’t have time to do work they are supposed to do. Ned committed the team to do a favor for one department once. And, because he’s a nice guy, now he feels as if he has to do favors for everyone all the time.

He is being guilted into doing more than he and his group should.

Ned is not unique. We all want to do what’s right for the organization. Sometimes we hear this as “being a team player.” Sometimes, us technical folks have specific expertise that no one else has, so we feel as if we have to perform a certain task.

Well, it’s possible that someone has to perform that work. And maybe that someone is not you or your team or group. If you or your team are doing favors, and you are being take advantage of, it’s time to learn to say no. This might be the most difficult job you’ve ever learned. And, it might be the most useful tool you ever learn.

Once you learn all the ways to say no, you can say no to the guilt, as well as the work. And, if the work has to be done—“but not by you or your group”—you can work with the people who currently need you to help find a solution. You don’t have to keep this work forever.

Managing the project portfolio isn’t easy. But it allows you to

complete the work that you and your group need to complete. It allows you to see what is yours to do and not do. And, it helps you learn how to manage your work without guilt. To learn more, see [Manage Your Project Portfolio](#).

More from Johanna

I consult, speak, and train about all aspects of managing product development. I'm more interested in helping you become more effective than I am in sticking with some specific approach. There's a reason my newsletter is called the "Pragmatic Manager"—that's because I am!

If you liked this book, you might also like the other books I've written:

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- [Diving for Hidden Treasures: Finding the Value in Your Project Portfolio](#)
- [Essays on Estimation](#)
- [Manage Your Job Search](#)
- [Hiring Geeks That Fit](#)
- [Manage Your Project Portfolio: Increase Your Capacity and Finish More Projects](#)
- [Manage It! Your Guide to Modern, Pragmatic Project Management](#)
- [Behind Closed Doors: Secrets of Great Management](#)

In addition, I have essays in:

- [Readings for Problem-Solving Leadership](#)
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