



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

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26 June 2002

### Communicate Proactively Based on Your Project Size

You all know the drill. You are managing a project, solving problems, providing leadership to the team, and trying to get all the work done on time and within budget. However, when your manager or your client asks how the project is going, you of course reply “oh fine”.

Many project managers try to communicate with the minimum possible effort and in the fewest words. Part of this hesitancy is a lack of comfort with written and verbal communication in general. It could also be that most project managers simply do not understand the value that proactive communication provides to a project.

First, like it or not, let’s agree that communication is one of the core project management processes. Second, let’s remember the philosophy about scaling the project management processes based on the size of the project. For small projects, the level of communication might be as simple as making sure the business client understands that the work has begun, and notifying them when the work is completed. Nothing fancy there.

#### Status Reports Satisfy Basic Communication Requirements

Problems can arrive when you apply this small project model to much larger projects. As you get into larger projects, for instance, you see the typical requirement for status reporting. Status Reports provide feedback to the key stakeholders on the current status of the project and what work has been completed since the last communication. These are also forums to discuss outstanding issues, scope change requests, risks, etc. The main purpose of the status reports is to manage expectations, and make sure there are no surprises. Delivering bad news is not a communications problem. Not effectively managing expectations is a problem, if clients or stakeholders end up being surprised. Lay it all out in the status report. Don’t surprise people.

#### Create a Communication Plan for Large Projects

On larger projects, especially those that impact a wide variety of people, the basic status report is no longer enough. The communication needs to be proactive, multifaceted and targeted. This is the time for establishing a formal Communication Plan. In a Communication Plan, you think about your major stakeholders, what their information needs are and the best way to satisfy those needs. Then you tailor specific types of communication to meet the particular needs of each audience. In a Communication Plan you identify and satisfy three types of communication:

1. **Mandatory** communication such as budget and status reports.
2. **Informational** elements such as an online repository of project documentation, lunch and learns and frequently asked questions.
3. **Marketing** elements such as pep rallies, success stories, testimonials and posters to display in the company lobby.



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### **Communication - Just Do It!**

Project managers must get over the fear and reluctance to communicate proactively. Communication is a powerful arrow in your project management quiver. I have seen projects where the project manager thought he or she had done a good job, but the client was not satisfied because he or she did not know what was going on. I have also seen projects that went badly overbudget and deadline, but were still viewed as a success, because the client knew what was going on and the expectations were managed well.

You have all heard the simple saying, “communicate, communicate, communicate”. Project managers should take this to heart. There are many aspects of a project that are not totally within your hands. Communication, however, is something that is directly within your control. You might be surprised how smoothly your project progresses when you communicate proactively to the team, clients and stakeholders.