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The Emotional Roller Coaster of Getting Stuff Done

April 24, 2018 | By Kevin Stoker
Instructional Design

Getting things done is both daunting and empowering...and sometimes overwhelming. It's likely rare that you have too little to do. Every day you look at that pile of work on your desk or the 500 emails that you need to respond to and you wonder how you'll get through it. When you look at the totality of the things you need to accomplish it can sometimes feel like the weight of the world is on your shoulders. But it doesn't have to be that way.

As a project manager, I may look at the world a bit differently than most, but I have found this perspective to be effective and rewarding. I'm guessing when people hear the words "project management" they may cringe ever so slightly. And when it comes to detailed, formal project management, I'm the first person in the cringing line. I have been a project manager for 11 years and have spent quite a bit of time trying to simplify every project I work on. This not only helps me personally, but also helps the teams I work with focus on the task at hand.

When I see all of those unread emails or that pile of work on your desk, I find that it helps if I break everything down into smaller projects and ask myself a few questions about each project:

- What is the work that needs to be completed?
 - Write down what needs to be delivered to complete each project
- How much time do I have?
 - Take note of how long it will take to complete the work along with the due date
- What's most important?
 - Prioritize each project (and the tasks associated with each project) and determine what needs started first and what can wait.

Now you're all set to go, right? Well...there's one more thing to consider. You now understand the nuts and bolts of what needs to be accomplished, but there's an emotional side to getting all of this work done. As Bob Lewis points out in his book *Bare Bones Project Management* (2006), each project goes through a predictable trajectory of emotions:

- Unenlightened Optimism
 - You're excited to get going on the project and see it through. You don't know exactly what you're in for but you're sure it will go smoothly.
- Dawning Pessimism
 - As obstacles to completing the project start to appear, your initial excitement starts to wane. This can be a dangerous time but it's important to stay focused on completing each task and fight through any distractions.
- Enlightened Optimism
 - After a while you start to see tangible progress. You're completing tasks and are in a groove.
- Pre-Completion Doldrums
 - The finish line is close but you're starting to get tired. Some of the annoying final details that still need completed.
- Success!
 - You've completed all your tasks and you're ready to move on to the next project. But make sure you take time to celebrate your accomplishment. You've worked hard. Don't be afraid to pat yourself on the back. You've earned it.

So now you're looking at that pile of work on your desk and hundreds of emails. At this point, you now understand what needs done, how long it will take, what is most important, and the emotions you will go through...So just get started and do it! It may actually be easier than you think.

References

- Lewis, B. (2006). *Bare bones project management: What you can't not do* Eden Prairie, MN: IS Survivor Publishing.
- Project Management Institute. (2004). *A guide to the project management body of knowledge (PMBOK guide)*. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.

About the Author

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Kevin Stoker provides project management and governance of all course design within the Institute while also managing its overall project portfolio. Kevin has served Franklin University since 2006