



Dr. Flannes was interviewed for an article that appeared in the November 2007 edition of PM Network (published for all members of the Project Management Institute) on the subject of ways to avoid professional burnout.

WORK-LIFE >> BY JULIE PUI WONG

Beat the Burnout

After awhile, projects can start to look and feel the same. But it's possible to stay engaged and interested on the job—even year after year.

At one point or another, project managers may find themselves performing the same old job, day in and day out. Monotony sets in, and the duties become mundane and lackluster. But there are plenty of steps project managers can take to keep things fresh and interesting.

Never Stop Learning. “For project managers to stay engaged, they have to challenge themselves with new tools and new information,” says Katherine Ericsson, PMP, director of the project management office at southern Wine and Spirits Business Solutions Group in Miami, Florida, USA. Southern Wine offers two formal training sessions each year for Project Management Professional (PMP™) and Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM®) certification, as well as classes targeted at risk management, scope management, communication skills and presentation skills.

Keep Talking. Project professionals who lack communication skills can become frustrated and unmotivated when they can't get through to team members, which subsequently can lead to burnout, says Theofanis Giotis, PMP, CEO of ITEC, an IT and project management firm in Athens, Greece. Better communication will allow a positive climate amongst the team members, and that motivates them,” he says.

Use Others' Brain Power. To feed of others' expertise and enthusiasm, project managers should conduct group brain-

storming sessions with team members, says Diane White, PMP, program manager for Verizon IT, Tampa, Florida, USA. “Not only does it get the buy-in of the team, it develops trust and ownership,” she says. “Team members learn from each other, learn about each other and learn to work for the success of the project.”

Get Off Site. Maryrose Villamor, project manager for Accenture, a Manila, Philippines-based global management consulting and outsourcing firm, suggests conducting off-site teambuilding events every quarter to retain employees and reduce burnout. Her company hires professional corporate training consultants to conduct planning sessions in relaxed environments. When one of Southern Wine's project teams recently experienced burnout during a high-profile, high-stress IT project, the team—right up to the vice president level—was taken to a hotel conference room for a day of games, puzzles and teambuilding. “Afterward, the team was re-energized and re-motivated,” Ms. Ericsson says. “It felt like a fresh team.” During a lessons learned discussion, several months after project completion, the team still remembered the gesture.

Change Things Up. To stay challenged, project managers can volunteer their expertise to colleagues, asking to be involved with different types of projects no matter the size, says Margaret L. Love, PMP, senior instructor for Velociteach, a

project management training and education company in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. “Volunteer to manage the move to a new building or the investigation of an acquisition or even the selection of a new dining service vendor,” she says. “You may be able to make this your full-time job on a temporary basis or do it ‘off the clock.’”

Get Involved. Project managers can also keep their career exciting by staying involved in the profession, Mr. Giotis says. “Give lectures and speeches about project management to universities and conferences,” he says. “Join as a volunteer to a professional association in order to network and meet important colleagues with the same problems and interests like you.”

Let It Go. Project managers must learn to distinguish between tasks they can and cannot influence, says Steven Flannes, Ph.D., coauthor of *Essential People Skills for Project Managers* [Management Concepts, 2005] and principal of leadership training firm Flannes & Associates, Oakland, California, USA. “Don't let the goal of creating a ‘perfect’ project get in the way of creating a ‘good’ one,” he says.

Stay Positive. “Statement like, ‘This project will never get done on time’ create negativity and sow the seeds of burnout by creating a powerless mentality,” Dr. Flannes says. “Instead, create a more neutral statement such as, ‘Well, the project does not look good right now, but maybe there's something different I can try on Monday to turn it around.’”