Managing Your Projects

Hey labbers, this is Justin Boynton again, bringing you another piece of core content this time about project management, of course for bookkeeping professionals. Very, very exciting stuff. What I'm going to do here is go through an overview of project management and then go through some steps to successful project management. Hopefully you find some value in this. And let's get going here. Let's jump right in.

We're going to talk about an overview of project management and let's go over the definition. This is the definition that I pulled right off of Wikipedia. Give them the full credit here, but I want to go over some formal definitions and then go into really what it means. Here's a definition. Project management is the practice of initiating, planning, executing, controlling and closing the work of a team to achieve specific goals, to meet specific success criteria at a specified time. And notice how many times specific is used in that definition. It's very important to know, being very detailed oriented like our jobs are, it's very specific. It's very important for us to be very specific about our project management.

How about some challenges that come along with project management? Primary challenge is to achieve all the goals within all the constraints. We'll go through all of these, but this information is usually described in project documentation. Usually created at the beginning of the project management or development process. The primary constraints are usually scope or the amount of work that we need to be done. That's defined. Time, obviously we know what that means. Quality, so how well the work is done. And then budget, how much it costs to get everything done.

And the secondary and more ambitious challenge is to really optimize the allocation of necessary inputs and apply them to meet predefined objectives. A lot of big words there, but what does this really mean? It just means simply getting the work done correctly on time and within budget. That's what we want as business owners, that's what our clients want as them being business owners. If we do that, we have happy clients, we have happy clients that refer us, and we really don't have any problems in a perfect world at least.

Challenges of getting the work done correctly on time within budget. I'm going to break this down a little bit. Basically, you need to know what needs to be done and understanding the full scope of what that work entails. When you have your consultation with a client, you define what needs to be done there and then are you following up on everything? Are you getting everything done? And did you price it correctly? That's a big part of knowing what needs to be done.

As you get further along in your bookkeeping practice, you'll be able to price things a little bit better. In the beginning, I know for example, I had a couple of cleanup jobs. I had no idea how big they were. I'm sure there's a lot of you out there like this. You price them out at, oh yeah, I can do this for 1,000 bucks. And it's like three years of cleanup and 15 bank accounts and you're just, and you're in it forever. You learn to price those things correctly and you know up front what needs to be done.

Also having the information to get the work done. Do you have everything you need? Do you have all the statements, logins, all the websites where all this stuff is stored, all the shared drives, all of that kind of stuff, do you have everything that you need? And having the resources to process the information. In other words, do you have the time to get the work done? I know I'm probably not alone out there, but you get to the point where you start bringing on a lot of clients and you're like, yeah, yeah, bring it on. We can handle all this stuff. And then you get a couple of days in and realize, holy cow, I got a lot of stuff to do in a very, very limited amount of time. Knowing that the capacity of what you and your team have.

All right, so steps to successful project management. Step one, I talked to you about it before, knowing the project. Knowing the project inside and out, all the details up front, because you don't want to go back and forth with your client asking for information. It does a couple of things when you do this. One, you're not wasting your time or your client's valuable time communicating back and forth. But also, if you think about it, it establishes you as an authority and gives them the impression that you know what's really going on. If you put yourself in the client's shoes and you hire a bookkeeper as a professional and they keep coming back with saying, "Oh, I need this, Oh, I need that. Oh, I need this." You start to lose credibility there. Think about it from that perspective. And that's also a good example of why having good processes in place is so, so valuable.

But the big question is, how do you establish those processes specifically with project management? We're going to go knowing the project here continued. What you want to do is go through all your current clients. This is a best practice that I can't remember who taught it to me, but I love this idea. You go through all your current clients and you make a list of every single piece of information you've ever collected from them. It might seem like a lot, but a lot of them will be the same from client to client. Different statements, bank logins, payment processing platforms, payroll reports, anything you ever need or needed to do the client work. And list out, make a list of everything that you've ever collected and then document those in Excel or on paper or in your current project management system. Wherever you keep, wherever you currently keep track of valuable information like that.

And once you have that documented, make it into some type of template so that when you do bring on a new client, you can go take that template. You can go through all of this stuff with the client and if they don't have some of them, simply omit it. But you know from that template, from the list of every piece of information you've ever collected, it's a really great way to make sure you're getting all the information up front. And like I said, use this template with every new client that comes aboard to ensure you don't miss anything.

All right, so again, knowing the project continued, part of it, knowing it inside and out is knowing your client inside and out. Many times, when we take on new clients, this is, you don't know a heck of a lot about them going into it, but you learn more as you go forward. And it may not be possible to learn a bunch just in the initial consultation and close, but you can get a really good idea if you ask the right questions up front. There's a great resource in Bookkeeper Launch that I continually use that gives a list of questions that you should ask during the initial

consult. And how did we compile that list? Well, we probably followed the same rule that I did in the previous slide is, made a list of all the information we ever collected and we put it on that list and we make sure that we ask all those questions.

Couple of other things you can do is think about adding some questions about the client's business, like why did we start the business? Or why did they start the business? And what are they, where are they looking to take it? Also, a great idea to go over with their goals so you get a better idea of why they do the things that they do. Those are some keys to knowing the project upfront.

Step two, map it out. Once you know all the details of the project, map it out and identify key project requirements. Include dates and any other info needed. And this always helps me. The last point here is to help scratch it out on a notepad or maybe use a whiteboard so you can see the entire timeline in one place. If you have, I think I have an example here. Okay, so an example, you have some key clients come aboard that need six months cleanup and ongoing monthly services. An example of some key requirements or milestones would be number one, is make sure all engagement letters and payment forms are signed and input into the payment system, obviously.

Number two is clearly communicating to their client, their role in the process, their responsibilities as well as your responsibilities. You may want to establish some type of a communication system with them to simplify the process for both of you. These are different milestones that we're going through with the project. Number three here is getting access to the accounting software, the bank and credit card accounts, payroll reports, anything else you needed to complete the project. And then number four is starting to clean up. Starting to clean up and assigning roles to your team members with dates as to when it should be done.

Here's a key point. If you have a six-month cleanup, you know at some, to start the project, you'll need to get engagement letters and you'll need to communicate what's going to be going on for during that cleanup. And then getting access to everything. And then you can finally start the cleanup. But that process, depending on the client, may take a day, it may take a week. But having that clear timeline set up and written out and clearly mapped out is going to help you have a much more successful project. And then number five at the end is you established monthly cadence and assigning duties to all parts of the process. Hope that makes sense. I ran through how to map this out. These are simply some examples. There might be a bunch more milestones in there that you want to map out, but this is just a simple way to illustrate this.

All right. Step three is you want to evaluate the process. After you go through and you perform that six-month cleanup or you start to perform the monthly ongoing services, always evaluate. You're always looking to improve your process. Great time to lean on your team members for their knowledge and ask them how the process could work a little bit better. Many times, they see things in a little bit different perspective and can really shed some valuable light on how to improve the processes. Also, a great way to evaluate is during your regularly scheduled monthly meetings, ask your clients how the process is going. Get feedback from their end. This not only helps your project management, but it also helps your customer service. It helps all parts of

your business when you simply ask clients how the process is going, how they feel about it. And oftentimes they can provide the most valuable insight on how to improve your processes.

Okay so for example, this is really simple. If you're a week into a cleanup with three weeks left, step back and see if you're really finished with the core of the work. Pretty easy to look at. You have a month cleanup for example, and you're a week into it and you have three weeks left. You can look at it and say, "Oh geez, am I really done quarter of the work?" If not, then essentially you need to reassess the project at that point and look at ways to ensure the project gets done, whether that's setting aside a time for yourself, having another contractor help you, whatever it may be. But you want to make sure you hit that end deadline when it comes.

Okay, so moving on, I'm going to talk about other items and insights. I'm going to talk about documentation and communication. Obviously the most important part of a project management system is great communication, whether it's communication with the team, communication with the client, it's essential. And you want to document every part of the project, but even more importantly, keep that documentation in one place so that everyone can find it easily and not waste any time searching for it. How many times have you had a document stored in this Google drive folder and then you have something else on your computer and not in the cloud and the other and then you have receipts over here in the hub doc and you have things everywhere. But it's so much easier when everything is all in one spot and all team members and clients have access to it in one place. It's so essential.

I'll give you an example. About six months ago I was searching for a project management system and I was having a really hard time finding a good one because I wanted everything to be in one spot for both my team members and my clients so that when we all communicated together, we all saw it. Once I did that, I had an amazing epiphany of the amount of emails that I received, I went down by about 80%. And all that was is due to setting up a good process in managing these projects so everything was done in one spot. I got rid of a ton of emails, which is, I know it seems to be a problem for everyone. That's just an example of having everything in one spot can really affect your business.

And next I want to talk about picking the right software management system. Now you see it on the screen here. Notice I didn't say software. You don't need software, although there are great options out there for it. You can use Excel or Google sheets or whatever. If that works for you, use it. Accounting software has basic project management built into them with different tasks and due dates and all of that. If you're using that and if it will work for you, use it. If someone recommends a good software for you and you like it, use it. The key is, is use it and stick with it.

Some resources that I found. While I was putting these slides together, I did a quick Google search on project management software products and 42 came, this list of 42 came up. Now are you really going to go through 42? Does anyone really have the time to go through 42 different project managers? Absolutely not. And if you say yes, you're crazy. Be careful. Don't get caught and spending the good part of the week signing up for different trials. Next thing you know you have seven different trials for different project management systems and none of them talk with each other and all of that. Be careful of that. Of course, you can do your

research, but just be careful not to waste too much time on it. Bookkeeper Launch and bookkeeper Lab Facebook groups are a great resource because obviously they do what you do and ask what others use, but don't get caught in the same trap because you asked someone in the group, you'll get a whole litany of different project management systems that people use.

Find some that are successful. Perhaps maybe someone else that shares the same niche as you might have a good suggestion on what kind of project management system works for that specific niche. Now, those are good questions to ask. Just simply ask what others use but don't get caught in the same trap as simply Googling it. But the best advice is build a list of features that it's kind of like a pros and cons list. If you go through and really think about what your project management needs and then what you would want to have in different project management softwares. And then number three is something that would be nice to have, but you could live without it.

Once you have that list, spent an hour or two looking at different project managers and see which ones have the features you need. Better yet, if you have a VA you're working with, this might be a nice project for them to go out there and to do a little bit of research on which project management system would work best. Again warning, don't get caught up in investigating all of them. They all do a good job and it's just finding one that you like. But the most important part of any one of these is picking a system and sticking with it. There are few greater time wasters than using one software and then moving on to another one. We've all run into that. I'm sure that let's just say it's a customer relationship management software or something like that.

You spend hours and hours and even days moving from one software to another only in another month you see an ad for another piece of software that does the same thing. Only it has this feature and only has this feature. You spend so much time migrating all your data over that it's a huge, huge time waster. I highly recommend picking one and sticking with it. And I wish this would've happened for me because it took me two years to figure out a good project management system. I wasted; I can't tell you how much time I wasted. It was, I wish I had a lot of that time back just let you know that because it's, it was so incredibly frustrating. Use it and stick with it.

Wrapping it up. Number one, know your project inside and out. Ask a lot of questions. Make sure you cover your bases so that you can do the job your client is asking for. Number two is map out your project. This allows you to see it all at once. Make sure nothing is missed. And number three is evaluate the project. Always look to improve the processes and become more efficient, thus increasing your capacity so you can grow. And then find a project management system that works for you and stick with it.

Again, hope you found this helpful. I actually found it really helpful putting this together and really thinking this out and mapping it out. I think this is a great lesson, although probably not the most exciting lesson, but I think a lot of people will get, will gain some good knowledge from this. If you have any questions, let us know and thank you so much for your time today and we'll see you in the next lesson. Thanks.