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How to Do 15% More with the Same People



Even on the most demanding projects, there's extra capacity that you're missing. Three ways to find and use it

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I recently met with a small business owner who was having a particularly troublesome year. An important project was running significantly behind schedule and considerably over budget. His team was tapped out, grumpy and tired, openly complaining about the extra hours they were logging. With no budget to hire, he felt overwhelmed, unsure of how to get things back on track.

It's a problem I've seen far too often. It seems there's always too much work to be done, and not enough resources. The stress that can result from this mismatch often hits hardest when the extra work to be done is strategically critical.

Reassuringly, these types of situations are often easily fixed. The truth is, there is usually at least 15% people capacity on your project team, just waiting to be discovered and made available to re-deploy. And in fact, when our team has applied this thinking to our many client projects, we've almost always found even more in reserve.

The secret lies in getting everyone aligned to the most important initiatives associated with the project. While it sounds simple, you'd be amazed at how often misalignment occurs. Overlaps (two people doing the same work) are common, as are "underlaps"—important work not getting done. By

finding the redundant work and eliminating it, new capacity can be identified, and time made available to get the underlaps moving forward.

Here's how to find capacity on your project.

ALIGN THE SENIOR PROJECT LEADERS

Engage them in a frank, team-based conversation, facilitated by a professional. Review the project strategies to date, agree to move forward only on the activities that matter most to the project's success, and discard the others. Ensure these are still relevant in today's environment, and consider today's competition.

ALIGN THE PROJECT TEAM

Engage the larger team in a series of open, transparent discussions, both strategic and tactical. Ensure everyone understands the activities that matter most, and why they're critical to the project's success. Most importantly, ensure each individual is crystal clear on the specific activities he or she needs to do to support the project.

REDEPLOY RESOURCES

If you've done your job and eliminated unnecessary activities, you will most certainly find new capacity for your team. Redeploy the new resources, to support the activities that matter most.

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I've seen this capacity-finding approach work time and again. And, as I explained to my weary business owner friend, the results always far exceed the alignment effort itself.

One of my clients, a manufacturer of floor care products, found 15% capacity when he applied this approach to his front office staff (Sales, Marketing, Finance and Operations Management). That allowed him to re-direct these newly discovered human resources to kick-start a major product innovation project, resulting in an 8% gain in market share within the year.

Looking for new capacity to get the special project done? Try aligning your teams to the jobs that really matter. You may soon find yourself announcing to everyone that work ends at noon on Friday of the next long weekend.

Fred Pidsadny is the founder and president of FOCUS Management, a consulting firm that has helped hundreds of clients of all sizes to improve performance and value by aligning teams and focusing on strategy execution excellence. He has enjoyed a 30-year career as a sought-after speaker, facilitator and advisor to business leaders across Canada and the United States.

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