

Did the vendor give you lemons?

Sabrina had awarded a sizeable application development project to a vendor with which her company had a good relationship. She was pleased the vendor had agreed to follow the new development methodology that Sabrina was planning to try in this project. It was a partially iterative approach, with planned re-work of some requirements and development.

Once the vendor's team came on site, Sabrina quickly identified some concerns about the vendor's project manager. Frank had a great personality, and was easy to talk with, but seemed to be lacking in planning and scheduling skills. Sabrina asked him a few times in different ways to show her the schedule, but he couldn't seem to pull it together. The project was a big initiative with a lot of integration needed with other teams and other vendors, so the scheduling was essential. Sabrina concluded that, although Frank was a great guy, he wasn't a good enough project manager, so she planned to ask the vendor's VP to replace him.

Sabrina shared her plan with a colleague, but he had another point of view. Sandeep pointed out that there may be some advantage to having a vendor project manager with a lighter touch. Frank might also be less hungry for change requests, which could be helpful, as the new development approach lacked some clarity while they were trying it out. There was another challenging concern; what if the vendor provided someone worse? She could hardly keep trading in PMs repeatedly. Sandeep also noted that the company had a long and valued relationship with this vendor, and Sabrina's request might damage that relationship.

A different mindset

After the discussion with Sandeep, Sabrina approached the problem with a different mindset. Instead of *How do I get a better PM for my project?* she asked herself *How do I get better planning and scheduling with the PM I've got?*

With that perspective as her foundation, Sabrina created a schedule template and gave it to Frank. She asked him to fill in fifteen or twenty lines for a specific set of features and gave him a due date. On that date, Sabrina met with Frank and asked for feedback on the schedule template. She revised the template based on his comments and gave Frank a deadline to complete the template for another specified set of capabilities. This directive approach worked very well, and Frank was able to develop a good schedule. It was clear that he understood the work to be done and the capabilities of his team. He just needed very specific direction regarding the schedule itself.

An unexpected benefit

During the project, the management team conducted surveys to see how the team was feeling about the project. When Sabrina reviewed the survey results, she was pleased to see her team was among the most satisfied on the project. She also knew this team was delivering high-quality, timely output and on budget too. This result was despite the difficulty of the work and lack of recognition this team received during the project from management. On reflection, Sabrina realized this outcome was due to Frank! Although she had worried about his hard skills, Sabrina had not recognized the value of his personality. He got to know his team very well, solicited their input, kept up to date on the news of their pets and families, and demonstrated respect for their capabilities. Under his leadership, they delivered their best work always.

Conclusion

At first, she thought the vendor had handed her a poor project manager, a lemon, and that she had turned him into lemonade. In the end, she realized he had been lemonade all along and she just hadn't seen it. Trying Sandeep's new perspective before solving the problem really paid off for Sabrina. She continued

to apply this perspective in all future work: *How do I make every member of my team successful, whether they look like the right fit immediately or not?*



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