

Ron Rosenhead

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Senior managers- what role do you take in projects?

Running training events is often a dumping ground for people's frustrations. I guess we have all done it thinking this guru will help us solve all our problems. However, some of our problems are deeply ingrained and take a lot of shifting.

One such problem is the role that senior manager's play *or should play in projects*. The terminology does get in the way however we believe that all projects need a sponsor someone who gives executive support to the project manager and project. This is a person who among other things:

1. Commissions (asks, tells, informs discusses) others to undertake the project
2. Briefs the project manager about the project, its history and any 'political issues' surrounding it
3. Agrees the level of accountability and responsibility the project manager will have
4. Signs off the business case and other project management documents
5. Actively reviews the project with the project manager at agreed dates ensuring it is 'on track'

We have surveyed over a 1000 people who have been on our project management events and the report makes poor reading. When asked whether roles, responsibilities, and levels of authority are always clear in projects we received the following results:

Strongly agree:	2.8%
Agree	34.3%
Disagree	51.0%
Strongly disagree	9.7%
Don't know	2.3%

People feed back to us that the role of the sponsor is often missing. In one organisation sponsors earned the unenviable title of *sleeping sponsors*. Sponsorship is an active process and one of the keys to project success. Without active

participation by senior managers projects are contributing to poor project performance e.g.:

- giving a project an impossible delivery date without approving extra resources
- not giving the project manager the authority to carry out the project having to go through various decision making processes to get approval for spending small sums of money not approving project changes in a timely way delaying progress

Sponsors need to be trained and developed to ensure that the sponsor role is carried out effectively. They got to a senior management role through their expertise and training and when they take on a senior role project sponsorship comes along with it. It is not a criticism of senior managers more a plea for them to take their sponsorship role seriously, including attending formal training events.

If you are senior manager then you need to be aware of what your role entails, what decisions you and the project manager should be making. You should be agreeing the level of control that is appropriate for each project and ensuring there is a system in place for managing project changes, capturing project risks and identifying and managing stakeholders. These are a few of the key things that are needed.

But senior managers beware! Project managers are starting to bite back! They are using risk management as a tool to explain that the project is in danger. They are quite clear they are not hiding from delivering their project but to deliver they need the *active* involvement of senior managers.

They are identifying on the risk log the lack of involvement by their sponsor. When project problems occur, the project manager directs the sponsor to the risk log - a copy having been received by the sponsor!

Now it takes a brave project manager to do this but it has had some positive impact with senior managers beginning to realise that if the project is to be delivered they had better be more involved.

So senior managers the gauntlet has been thrown down reduce project risk and get more involved. Over to you!!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Ron Rosenhead helps professional staff deliver projects. He works with solicitors, accountants, social workers, managers etc helping them deliver projects on time and to budget. He is a professional speaker, trainer, coach and author all in the field of project management. He can be contacted at +44(0) 208 446 7766 or www.ronrosenhead.co.uk/contact