

Gray Is A Color You Want To Avoid

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In project management, black and white are your friends – murky gray is not. As a project manager, you want to deal with clear and verified information, not assumptions. When assumptions are made and not validated, mistakes get made, timelines get delayed, and projects fail.

Assumptions are dangerous things to make, and like all dangerous things to make — bombs, for instance, or strawberry shortcake — if you make even the tiniest mistake you can find yourself in terrible trouble. Making assumptions simply means believing things are a certain way with little or no evidence that shows you are correct, and you can see at once how this can lead to terrible trouble. For instance, one morning you might wake up and make the assumption that your bed was in the same place that it

always was, even though you would have no real evidence that this was so. But when you got out of your bed, you might discover that it had floated out to sea, and now you would be in terrible trouble all because of the incorrect assumption that you'd made. You can see that it is better not to make too many assumptions, particularly in the morning."

— Lemony Snicket, *The Austere Academy*

As Lemony Snicket of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* states, assumptions are dangerous. Rarely based on fact, assumptions are based on personal perspective – not reality. Imagine how this can impact your ability to manage a team if you – and others – make assumptions in regard to something as integral as task completion.

The Project Success Method uses activity managers to ensure that every task gets done. During the planning session for any project, it's important to create a work breakdown structure – a list of all the project activities of everything your team can think of at the moment. At the moment is important here because it's rare that even the best teams will catch every single task that must be completed at the very beginning of a project. The activities will not be in any particular order, as sequencing will not have taken place yet. They also won't necessarily have an owner or a duration. It will literally just be a list of activities.

These tasks can't stay ownerless though. Each task must be assigned an owner—that is, an activity manager – *one person* per activity. The activity manager agrees to make sure the work gets done. This is the person who looks at the project manager and says, "That's my task. I'll make sure it happens." This doesn't mean they have agreed to do the physical labor themselves, only that they agree to be the single point of contact regarding the activity. The single point of contact concept is very important, as it reduces confusion and adds clarity about who owns the task.

In project work, black and white are your friends—gray is your enemy. Anything gray and ambiguous will get used against you in the court of project management. Assumptions create expectations built on nothing more than what *you* think is reality, not what really *is* reality. Successful project management doesn't operate in the gray – black and white are critical to your success. Anything gray and ambiguous will get used against you in the court of project management.

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