How Do I Lead a Project Kickoff Meeting?

The Problem:

Most (if not all) projects begin with the famous "kickoff meeting". In many ways this meeting (for better or worse) sets the tone for the rest of the project. As such, it's important that the project leader conduct a very effective and efficient kickoff session for the team. But, oftentimes team leaders don't really understand the kickoff meeting. What should really be accomplished during a kickoff meeting? What is the purpose? What can the team leader do to avoid common pitfalls? The team leader must have a firm grasp on these answers prior to facilitating this critical meeting. Here are some tips to help you as you plan for your next kickoff meeting.

Consider these suggestions….

- Make sure you have a basic understanding of the key project elements (e.g. scope, goals, stakeholders, deliverables, etc.) before the meeting.
- Conduct pre-meetings with the project sponsor or client to clarify his/her expectations on scope, time, cost, and quality.
- Ensure that the project sponsor attends the session to emphasize the importance of the effort
- Document and clearly post the project objective(s) to ensure they're clearly understood by all.
- Conduct detailed introductions including some personal information to ensure that all roles are fully understood and team members begin to make connections.
- Communicate key background information to the team and work with them to develop more detail around key elements (e.g. scope (in/out), schedule, key tasks, milestones, costs, risks, etc.).
- Address key process issues with the team (e.g. how will meeting notes be captured, decisions on meeting logistics, etc.).
- Ask the team to develop meeting ground rules – utilize best practice input from previous projects.
- Define success criteria for the project (with input from sponsor/client) – How will the team know if the project is successful?
- If the project tasks aren't clear, post a flip chart page on the wall for each phase of the project and ask team members to brainstorm tasks on post its. Then, organize the post its chronologically.
- Allow task owners to provide timing estimates for tasks.
- Ensure all task areas/phases have a single defined owner.
- Ask each participant to share a potential risk (make it anonymous if needed).
- Document all action items with an owner, task, and due date
- Have food and make it fun!

If you have other tips on this challenge, please email us at tips@meetinggenie.com!

Next Meeting Challenge Corner Topic:

How Can I Improve My Project Status Meetings?