

## 5 Ways to Reinvigorate Your Project Team

by Jennifer Katus, PMP

We've all felt it. Our project is on track towards the end goal, deliverables are coming in on time, the project finances are in good shape, but something is missing with the project team. The initial enthusiasm they had when the project started has faded. Guess what – their productivity will fade too, if you don't do something fast to re-engage them.

Here are five ways to reinvigorate your project team.

### 1. A Contest

It's not the goal, the rules, or even the prize that really matters in this contest. What you are seeking is something different and suspenseful to capture your team's attention.



I ran one long-term project where my team got, quite frankly, bored. One week I walked into our status meeting with a box. I had wrapped it with paper that said "Shhhh – it's a surprise!" with question marks all over it. I was very mysterious about the contents.

I told the team we were having a contest. The first person to get me their status update on Friday would win this prize. The winner would be announced in next week's status meeting. I let them shake the box; really give it a good once-over. "What is she up to?" I could hear them wondering. It got their attention and they started buzzing about the box.

I displayed the box in my office for the whole week. I got a lot of early status reports that Friday. The following week I brought the box back to our status meeting. The winner was announced. He eagerly opened the prize. It was an Einstein head Chia Pet. The team roared with laughter over the silliness of the enthusiasm I generated with such a quirky and trivial prize. Our status meeting was much livelier that week, and for weeks to come.

The key to these kinds of contests is to make them easy for you and the team, a little suspenseful, and very short term. You want to see results quickly without having some massive administrative overhead to run the contest. And if they are too difficult to win, the team might be overwhelmed and demotivated. So keep it short, sweet, inexpensive, and fun.

### 2. A Mascot



Why do sports teams have mascots? Because they are a silly but simple way to give the team an identity and to have some fun. More projects need mascots! To really experience the benefit of a mascot, you need to engage the mascot in the project's operations. One way is to award the mascot to a different team member at each status meeting.

Some possible reasons for awarding the mascot are:

- Effort above & beyond expectations
- Superior customer service
- Best idea of the week
- Proactive problem solving
- A dunce award (but be careful with this one).

The mascot character can be tied into the theme of the project...or not. It should be something fun and neither too feminine nor masculine. I've seen mascots become so endeared to teams that they hold onto them for years.

### 3. A Break

A break from procedure can be a fantastic and free reward for any team. Allow your team a chance to recharge by giving them a week off from some procedural task like a status report, status meeting, budget update, or risk review meeting.



Of course use your judgment to determine prudent timing for this benefit. Good times may occur around the holidays, or when the project is stable and not particularly busy, or when the team is absolutely swamped and needs to focus more on output than procedure. If procedural breaks make you nervous, try following up individually with key team members so you can assure yourself that the project is still on track.

### 4. A Treat

Bring treats to a meeting. (Obviously, this only works if you don't regularly provide treats to your team...which you shouldn't be doing anyway...but that's a different topic for a different article.) Treats don't have to be expensive to be appreciated. One way to make treats more impressive is to make them visually appealing.



For example, arrive at your project status meeting five minutes early. Scatter some foil-wrapped chocolates all down the center of the conference table. When your team members walk in, the sparkling foil will capture their attention. And who doesn't salivate at the site of chocolate?! By scattering the treats, a little goes a long way and the treats will be in close proximity to everyone at the table. No more candy bowl hogs!

### 5. A Progress Checkpoint



Sometimes teams get so involved in work that they lose sight of their accomplishments. Help your team recognize their progress. Pull out your old status reports and list out all of the things the project team has accomplished. Don't overlook intangible but important accomplishments like building a cohesive team, generating momentum, and developing a consistent mode of operation. (These intangible components tend to be the hardest to achieve, the most valuable to success, and the least celebrated.) Set aside time in your next project status meeting to distribute the list and verbally applaud your team for their progress. A sense of accomplishment is intrinsically invigorating!

If the program you are managing is so large that your sponsors do not know your project team leaders, take the time to fix this situation. Use your digital camera to take a headshot of each team leader. Paste the photos into the list of accomplishments and distribute the list to your sponsors. Without belaboring the point, inform your sponsors of your midstream progress and the people who have contributed to the success.

### **Whatever You Do, Communicate Why You are Doing It**

For an incentive to be meaningful, the recipient must understand why he or she is receiving it. In the case of reinvigoration, the reason you are providing a treat or a break or some other benefit is most likely to make your team feel appreciated. To make the results last longer, tie your benefit to a specific result, situation, or milestone.

When you are giving the benefit, communicate the reason for it. If people don't understand why they are receiving a treat or a break, they won't appreciate it as much. And they can't repeat the behavior that resulted in the reward if they don't know what behavior prompted it.

When you are reinvigorating your team, take a minute to reward and reinvigorate yourself too. Keeping yourself motivated and strong provides your team members with inspiration to do the same!



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