Managing Projects with Unrealistic Deadlines

If you are a project manager dealing with what you perceive to be an unrealistic deadline, the first thing you will want to try is to discuss this with your manager and see if there are any factors that are driving the project deadline that you may not be aware of. Sometimes the person who tells you of the deadline seems like the bad person, but see if you can understand what the motivation is. For instance, there may be a business driver that is driving the deadline. There may be some event occurring that this project needs to support. Or your project may be one of a number of initiatives that need to come together at a specific time. It does not necessarily make your challenge any easier, but you may find that by better understanding the reason for the deadline, you may have an easier time getting yourself and your team members motivated to try to achieve it.

On the other hand, if the deadlines seem arbitrary and are not the result of some other business driver, then you should find that out as well. Sometimes managers set arbitrary end dates just to provide what they consider to be stretch objectives. However, this can end up like the story of the boy who cried wolf. If your manager is not careful, there will be a time when there is a firm business justification for an aggressive end date, but no one will believe it.

Once you understand the motivation for the deadline date, there are project management techniques that can be utilized to increase the chances of success and better manage expectations.

This paper provides a summary of the full document. The full two-page white paper contains the following sections. It is available to licensed TenStep users.

Try to Adjust the Triple Constraints of Time, Cost and Scope

Utilize Risk Management

Utilize Scope Management

Aggressively Manage the Workplan

Look for Process Improvement Opportunities

Summary