

What Your Client And Team Needs Most: THE TRUTH

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“YOU CAN’T HANDLE THE TRUTH!” I’m guessing you not only heard a certain voice when reading this, you may have also visualized the scene and context of this quote. It ranks as one of the most recognizable cinematic quotes

yelled by Jack Nicholson in *A Few Good Men*. The fact is, not only *can* your client and team handle the truth...they *need* the truth. Without truthful, transparent, and realistic expectations, your project has a greater chance to fail.

I've personally observed this in situations with clients who have had unrealistic requirements at the start of a project. Before agreeing for the sake of "keeping the client happy" a thorough evaluation of the requirements is in order. The result of this analysis may indicate a negotiation is needed for more time, a larger budget or a reduction in scope any of which is sure to invoke displeasure from the client. While it may not be the conversation you *want* to have, it's the conversation you *need* to have.

Customers will always have targets in terms of scope and timing. Those targets are important, and the goal is always to meet them perfectly. However, during the planning and control processes, it's up to the project manager to help reconcile desire with reality.

The project manager's job is to deliver the project successfully – on time, on budget and with all the scope initially agreed to. A project manager who can't manage scope shouldn't be in that role. This includes the ability to say no to internal customers; otherwise, you end up with "paper schedules". The schedule works on paper but nobody on the team believes it can actually be met.

Of course, this is easier said than done, but consider the alternative. If you agree to an unrealistic customer request, you spend the entire project with your stomach tied up in knots, praying for a miracle to occur, but fully expecting the hammer to drop when someone in senior management finally realizes you aren't going to deliver. Every day you show up at work wondering, "Is this the day they figure it out?"

Alternatively, if you say no to unrealistic deadlines at the beginning of the project and negotiate a mix of time/cost and quality that your team can actually deliver, everyone is free of unnecessary stress. Of course, the stress is higher in the beginning, but life, overall, is much calmer and more relaxed. Plus, your team loves you because you fought for them, unlike almost every other project manager they've ever worked with. And truthfully, senior management isn't stupid—they'd

rather know you'll push back in the beginning but ultimately deliver than put their trust in a project manager who says "no problem" but then fails.

Taking some liberty with one of Ben Franklin's famous quotes, consider this the next time you are assigned and/or accept a project: the bitterness of poor quality remains long after the sweetness of early promises are forgotten. Learn more about effectively managing and leading teams to achieve project success by tuning in to my podcast: [The Conversation with Clinton M. Padgett](#).

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