

How can your project sponsor help you? ¹

Yogi Schulz

Project managers and teams suffer dysfunctional consequences when project sponsors aren't helping or shirk their roles. Projects flounder when sponsors are absent, hiding deliberately or unsure of their role.

Ideally, project managers collaborate with project sponsors and stakeholders to position projects for success, reduce risks, and mitigate the impact of the various issues that arise as projects proceed.

Here's a list of actions project sponsors can undertake to help project managers and teams.

You can explore these and other tips to help project sponsors and project managers be more effective in our new book, *A Project Sponsor's Warp-Speed Guide - Improving Project Performance*. It's available from Amazon at this [link](#).

Champions project benefits throughout the organization

The project sponsor and steering committee members must enthusiastically communicate, sell and defend the project benefits in meetings and informal discussions throughout the organization. If these individuals fail to champion the benefits or, worse, challenge the benefits or criticize the project, the project is doomed.

For example, they remind the organization of the project's value proposition and maintain its commitment to the project at various management meetings or town hall events.

When this visible public support is not occurring, project managers provide project sponsors and steering committee members with brief talking points to encourage more communication.

Provides support and guidance for the project manager

The project sponsor provides support and guidance for the project manager. The project sponsor offers organizational insights to the project manager, who often does not have enough seniority and reputation for the organization to accept necessary but unwelcome recommendations.

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When project managers feel neglected, they can reach out to project sponsors to reconfirm the following best practice points for their relationship:

- Commit to a firm schedule of meetings with the project manager. The frequency is usually weekly or bi-weekly.
- Respect the project manager's mandate and delegation.
- Provide open, frank feedback to the project manager on project observations and how improvements could be made.
- Demand honest opinions from the project manager about project status and issues.
- Guide the project manager in helpful areas such as internal politics, corporate history, and prejudices held by various stakeholders.
- Will not create pressure to provide a false, overly optimistic project status.
- Operate the project manager relationship based on mutual trust.
- Ensure the project manager receives leadership coaching if needed.

Conversely, if the project sponsor loses confidence in the project manager, the project sponsor must replace the project manager.

Supports the team at a strategic level

The project sponsor gives meaningful guidance to the team on quality vs cost vs schedule trade-offs as these arise. The team documents the conclusion in the issues log. The project sponsor enforces ethical standards.

For example, the project sponsor clarifies team questions about the organization's strategic plan and how the project best aligns with the plan.

When teams feel ignored, project managers can diplomatically encourage project sponsors to hold a project issues meeting with the team.

Encourages the team

The project sponsor occasionally speaks to the entire team to publicly provide kudos, encouragement and boost morale. On these occasions, the project sponsor strongly supports the project and the team's work.

For example, the project sponsor can share some senior management scuttlebutt that would be good for the team to hear and reinforce the importance of the team's work for the organization.

When teams feel unappreciated, project managers can diplomatically encourage project sponsors to attend a team meeting.

Ensures resource commitments are fulfilled

When the project was approved, various stakeholders accepted resource commitments to work with the project. However, as the project proceeds, the business departments are typically hit with new resource demands and gradually de-commit from the project. Only the project sponsor can reverse this trend.

For example, only the project sponsor can effectively glare at the managers or VPs to rebuild the commitment. Project managers can't do that and survive in the organization.

It's up to project managers to point out this failure to fulfill commitments to project sponsors for resolution.

Resolves issues that the project manager cannot resolve

Every project develops issues related to scope, priorities and approach. Only the project sponsor can resolve or lead the resolution of the more significant issues that tend to cross organizational lines.

For example, the project depends on manufacturing data, and the data quality is low. Only the project sponsor can march into the office of the VP of Manufacturing and ask that the data be cleaned up and extract a commitment that the data will remain high quality into the future.

It's up to project managers to raise these issues with project sponsors for resolution.

Shields the team from distracting internal politics

To the greatest extent possible, the project sponsor shields the team from distracting and harmful internal politics. The project sponsor also defends the project team from being hijacked to solve a crisis in the business.

For example, if the team is distracted and upset by rumours of a reorganization or downsizing, the project sponsor can reassure the team.

It's up to project managers to raise the concerns with project sponsors for attention.

Ensures the team's performance

Through discussions and reports, the project sponsor monitors the team's performance at a high level. The project sponsor makes a determined effort to support the project manager and the team. However, changes must be made if the project manager loses confidence in the performance of specific individuals or some team members.

For example, if some team members are absent excessively or interfere with the work of others, such behaviours can not be ignored.

It's up to project managers to candidly share team performance issues with the project sponsor. Allowing non-performance to fester only adds cost and risk to the project.

Project sponsors can often help project managers improve project performance if they share issues without exaggerating their potential impact. You can explore these and other topics that help project sponsors in our new book, *A Project Sponsor's Warp-Speed Guide - Improving Project Performance*. It's available from Amazon at this [link](#). View the book as a reference tool. You don't have to read it all to obtain actionable insights.

About the Author



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Yogi Schulz has over 40 years of Information Technology experience in various industries. Yogi works extensively in the petroleum industry to select and implement financial, production revenue accounting, land & contracts and geotechnical systems. He manages projects that arise from changes in business requirements, from the need to leverage technology opportunities and from mergers. His specialties include IT strategy, web strategy and systems project management.

Mr. Schulz regularly speaks to industry groups and writes a regular column for [IT World Canada](#) and for [Engineering.com](#). He has written for Microsoft.com and the Calgary Herald. His writing focuses on project management and IT developments of interest to management. Mr. Schulz served as a member of the Board of Directors of the PPDM Association for twenty years until 2015. Learn more at <https://www.corvelle.com/>. He can be contacted at yogischulz@corvelle.com

His new book, co-authored by Jocelyn Schulz Lapointe, is "[A Project Sponsor's Warp-Speed Guide: Improving Project Performance](#)."