



# RECOVERING FROM A SCRUBBED PROJECT

SEPTEMBER 2017

By Tara Carr, Small Business Development Director at UW-Green Bay

Strong leaders proactively plan for every detail of a new project. The motions are set in place and the task list is never-ending. Leadership, IT, facility managers, attorneys, and project managers have put a great deal of time and effort into giving feedback and subject matter expertise on the implementation of the project. Setting priorities, roles, communicating to the right people at the right time and taking ownership are important factors in managing a project. Hours and hours of meticulous planning and thought have gone into the preparation. The project is on target and progress towards implementation is on track. Strong project management is completed by providing the right information at the right time to the right people that are impacted by the project.

Midway through the project, it comes to a screeching halt! The new project is scrubbed! Moving forward from a cancelled project can be challenging for those that dedicated time, energy and emotional investments. The leader needs to remain calm, emotionally balanced and be sensitive to the team members' reactions to the nixed project. People are seeking answers from the leader with every aspect of the project.

When a project is cancelled, these same people are not only seeking answers, but are also seeking emotional support from leadership. It is normal for the people invested to feel a sense of loss. Feelings of devastation, anger, frustration, and disappointment. The emotional trauma is real and can be damaging. Leadership must work to minimize the negative effects the cancelled project will have on the team. Productivity can decrease for months after the termination of a project. The greater the emotional investment, the greater the cancelled project can affect the team. Team members may experience depression, feelings of withdrawal and a sense of loss. The most detrimental behaviors a leader can portray are callousness and insensitivity toward the team and the loss they are suffering.



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Project termination may also create a negative work environment. Project managers or team members of canceled projects inevitably serve as a visible reminder of what could happen to other projects. Dr. Meir Statman and Dr. David Caldwell, professors at Santa Clara University, reported in their research that though companies acknowledge that project termination causes employee pain, they ignore the pain of employees who are retained while their projects are terminated.

Lessons learned: Projects change and in-depth project implementation takes a lot of time, emotional investment and money. Be sure to make informed decisions. Accept change, as it is probably for the better! Leaders need to offer emotional support and gratitude to their team and to others who contributed to the project.

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The Wisconsin Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at the University of Wisconsin Green Bay is part of a statewide network of SBDCs working with business owners and entrepreneurs to facilitate business growth and improvement, and to launch successful new companies. The Small Business Development Center offers a variety of services: no-cost business consulting, customized business solutions, financial management, growth & strategic planning, and professional development training.

