

INTRODUCTION

“My project is in trouble and I need some help.”

Every week, I receive calls from organizations looking for help achieving project success. The conversations start off with the callers indicating that they are looking for advice, but nine times out of ten, before I have even the slightest handle on the problem, the troubled caller springs their desired solution on me - and it is rarely something simple.

They want to focus on more rigorous and scientific methods for sizing the activities of their projects and running weighted scenarios across their portfolio. They want to explore more robust and consistent use of Microsoft Project and other tools. They want to concoct a homebrew of acronyms sure to deliver success: “We need to create Centers of Excellence (COEs) to better leverage ROI, EVA, CPI, UML, TQM, and SLAs.”

As the acronyms swirl through my head, I can’t help but make the connection between the detailed nature of their proposed solutions and the advice many “serious” poker players dole out as they lose money week after week. They talk incessantly about the importance of being students of “advanced” poker topics such as calculating exact probabilities, memorizing starting hand charts, and applying complex game theory.

In my experience, the more people focus on so-called advanced topics, the more they neglect the basics, whether in business or poker:

*Some people are so busy learning the tricks of the trade
that they never learn the trade.*

- Vernon “The Preacher” Law, 1960 Cy Young Award Winner

This focus on “tricks” and tools is reminiscent of the tale of the Las Vegas golfer:

A weekend golfer travels to Vegas to play some poker and “work” on his golf game. After shooting a 120 the first day, he vows to break 100 by the end of the week. The caddy tries to convince him to take a few lessons from the golf pro and assures him he could quickly shave off 20 strokes. Does he listen? No way. Instead, he goes back to an up-scale golf store on the Strip where he plunks down a grand for the latest and greatest set of titanium irons. A few days later he returns to the course, but only two things have changed:

1. 90% of the time he hits the ball exactly the same – except now he’s a little more pissed-off about it.
2. The rest of the time he still hits the ball in the wrong direction, only now he is able to hit it *much farther in the wrong direction*.

Neither of these helps his score. In fact, his score balloons to over 130.

This story illustrates why this book focuses on the fundamentals. *Beating the Odds* will help you succeed with the basic strategies that can make or break project success for anyone, beginner or expert. Yes, experts too. After all, when Tiger Woods gets in a

slump, does he run out and buy a new set of clubs? Of course not. He gets together with his coach to work on the fundamentals of his swing.

Leading Projects & Winning at Work

The fundamental premise of *Beating the Odds* is that in order to breakthrough abysmal project success rates, we must change our perspective from thinking that just doing “business as usual” will work. Instead, we must adopt a project-oriented perspective focused on actively setting up a game we can win. Many individuals don’t see their jobs in terms of projects to be delivered. Others fail to appreciate just how different a project-driven approach is. This combination is a primary contributor to what’s wrong with today’s work world.

Confusion regarding what a project is, and how one should be led, is why **organizations under perform**. It is why **half of all projects fail**. It is **why people are burned out and too many workers hate their jobs**.

Projects aren’t simply about saying: “Let’s do a project,” or, “I’m the project leader,” and then waiting for success to come to you. Projects aren’t about “managing” by a constant focus on contract changes, dress codes, and time tracking.

Instead, projects are what you set up and drive when you want to get something done, and done right. Projects are what you *establish* when success depends on the output of a high performance team. Projects are what you *lead* when you don’t have the authority to control your boss, your customers, and your partners.

What are the projects *Beating the Odds* applies to and how will you know them when you see them? They are everything from landing a new account, to launching a new product, to creating the perfect ad campaign. They are reorganizing your office, forming a new team, and knocking out the A#1 item on your to-do list. Projects are what you set up to deliver success in the boardroom, the conference room, and, yes, even the cardroom.

Projects aren’t always the fun way to play, but they are the winning way to play. And let’s face it:

Life’s a lot more fun when you are winning.