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## PMI TPSIG February '08 Newsletter

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# Project Management Institute Troubled Projects Specific Interest Group Newsletter

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Dear Karl Schaeffer,

Welcome to the February 2008 PMI TPSIG newsletter.

### • *Election Results*

The results of the recent TPSIG election are:

Gethsemani Palacios, PMP was elected VP - Information Technology.

Karl Schaeffer, PE, PMP was elected VP - Marketing/Communications

Charles McHenry, PMP, SSC was elected VP - Membership.

Bob Rippee, PMP, SSBB and Robert T. Fried, PMP were elected Directors at Large.

Thanks to all the candidates and to all the members who voted.

### • **TPSIG Goodies Now at Cafe Press!**

**Membership****VOLUNTEER!****TPSIG Board of Directors****President**

Joan Lundholm, PMP SSC  
*pres@tpsig.org*

**Membership**

Charles McHenry, PMP  
*vp-membership@tpsig.org*

**Information Technology**  
Gethsemani Palacios, PMP

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**Finance**

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**Communications/Marketing**  
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*vp-mktg@tpsig.org*

**Professional Development**  
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**Administration**

Sharon Sikes, PMP  
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**Director at Large**

Rob Fried, PMP  
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*volunteer@tpsig.org*

**Director at Large**

Bob Rippee, PMP, SSBB  
*director2@tpsig.org*

**TPSIG Web Journal Editors**

Dr. Susan Hillabold, PhD  
Jim Zaleschuk, PMP, P. Eng  
*Editor@tpsig.org*

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Gethsemani Palacios, PMP  
*webmaster@tpsig.org*

Check out the TPSIG store at [Cafe Press](#). Everything you need... now with a TPSIG logo.

## • ***What's All the Fuss about Troubled Projects?***

By Seth B. Greenwald, PMP

I'm troubled by all this talk about troubled projects. I don't understand what the fuss is all about. My projects always seem to run just fine. I don't need to get involved much. Let me give you an example. Yesterday my team came to me and asked, in unison, if I would allow them to stay late every night this week so that they can finish up a project before it was due. Well, what else could I say but "of course you could, and it would be absolutely no problem if you would like to work the weekend." My clients are marvelous as well. One of my projects was starting to show signs that it would be going over budget very soon. I mentioned this to the client and he cheerily told me not to worry and would re-allocate funds from some of his other projects to help out mine. It's really wonderful to work with such nice people.

**Continued**

## • **Lessons Learned**

The TPSIG Lessons Learned database input [template](#) has been finalized. Do you have a lesson learned that you want in the database? Please use the input form & submit to [lessons@tpsig.org](mailto:lessons@tpsig.org)

## • **Things That Make Projects Successful**

Accumulated Bob Cutler, PMP

Be honest. Never lie, cheat, or steal. It's OK to withhold information to avoid confusing someone, but never to manipulate.

**Continued**

## • **RISKY RESOLUTIONS**

by Dr David Hillson PMP FAPM

It's that time of year again! In January many people make New Year's Resolutions, capturing a mixture of good intentions and guilty consciences. The top five resolutions include: spend more time with the family, get fit, lose weight, quit smoking, and learn a new skill. Most of these survive only a few weeks, and get shelved again until the same time the following year. By the time you read this, it's likely that very few of your New Year's Resolutions will remain unbroken. Here are four risky resolutions which can truly transform your life, your projects and your business.

**Continued**

## • **PMI® Global Congress 2008-EMEA Location Changed to Malta**

The PMI Global Congress 2008-EMEA will be held in Malta, an island in the Mediterranean Sea situated midway between Italy and the northern coast of Africa.

The location of the congress had to be changed from Marrakech, Morocco to Malta due to unforeseen circumstances, including some logistical challenges that could not be overcome.

The congress and associated events will be held at the Hilton Malta, in the heart of the Portomaso waterfront in St. Julians, Malta, about 14km from the Malta International Airport. The dates for the congress remain the same as originally scheduled: 19-21 May, 2008. The Leadership Institute Meeting will occur on 16-18 May, also in Malta.

## • **Membership**

**As of 1/31/08 1,015 members**

**As of 12/01/07 1,125 members**

## • **VOLUNTEER!**

Help TPSIG become better. Help us deliver subject matter. Help us get sponsors. Help write newsletter articles. Earn PDUs. Work with other TPSIG members.

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## **What's All the Fuss about Troubled Projects?**

(continued)

I'm troubled by all this talk about troubled projects. I don't understand what the fuss is all about. My projects always seem to run just fine. I don't need to get involved much. Let me give you an example. Yesterday my team came to me and asked, in unison, if I would allow them to stay late every night this week so that they can finish up a project before it was due. Well, what else could I say but "of course you could, and it would be absolutely no problem if you would like to work the weekend." My clients are marvelous as well. One of my projects was starting to show signs that it would be going over budget very soon. I mentioned this to the client and he cheerily told me not to worry and would re-allocate funds from some of his other projects to help out mine. It's really wonderful to work with such nice people.

It seems to me that if we just keep our noses to the grindstone, do our work and not be so concerned about planning and all that 'big picture stuff', we'll be fine. I get my inspiration from the insect world. Have you ever seen how ants go about their projects? They don't really talk to each other and they get along very well. They have this special telepathic sense that makes everything go smoothly. Each of these little critters knows their place and understands that bad things could happen if he gets out of line. The things they build from sand and leaves are really quite spectacular. Very forward-thinking too with all this talk about Green buildings and LEED certification. Ants just do it right. They don't ask for a pat on the back. And anyway they're so small, I'd probably squish them if I tried.

And why all this worry about getting together to have meetings? Everyone already knows what to do. We're all professionals, right? I like to tell my team just to do it the same way you did on the last project. Not much is really going to change. And if it does we'll issue a change order. What's the big deal, anyway? We always plan well by putting in a very large contingency fee at the beginning of the project. We don't want to embarrass ourselves at the end.

Now that I'm thinking about it, maybe some of my projects are troubled. Let me cut to the chase and pinpoint the responsible party: Technology. Don't you agree that we all used to be much better off before these hi-tech gadgets, like fax machines, came into vogue? Everybody was perfectly content to work with traditional materials like paper and graphite. It gave us a sense of continuity and a link to history. Let me share with you a favorite story of mine. One late evening I was developing the design for a new-fangled pencil sharpener. I was at my drawing board, working happily, when all of a sudden I spilled coffee on my drawing. As you know, if this happened now-a-days, the whole computer would be shot and all the drawings would be lost. Luckily I was using a special type of Mylar sheet which allowed me to erase more efficiently. The hours of fun I had whisking the erasures onto the floor was indescribable. There, in a pile at my feet, was proof of my hard work. With computers it's all digital and virtual. So easy to make revisions that it's hardly worth doing at all.

There is one high-tech invention I do appreciate: Email. It's such a wonderful communication device. A real time saver. Here's how it goes....I send my message out to all of the project stakeholders and wait a day or two for their replies to come back. Then I take another day or so to sort out what they are saying because they usually are not in agreement with each other. I find this strange as my original email is always very clear and to the point. There's really no way that it could be misinterpreted. Isn't that why they encourage you to use those cute, little emoticons?

As I indicated earlier, I don't understand where all these troubled projects come from. Sometimes I think to myself that just once I would like to experience what other project managers are talking about. Maybe then I could offer my best practices to my fellow PMs. But then I think again to myself that I don't really have many good lessons learned except this one:

If I listen to people, I mean REALLY listen to what they are saying, not just what I think they are saying, then a lot of the "trouble" drops away and I could start to deal with the real issues that lurk just below the surface. I like to remind myself that it is people who make the project work, not the other way around.

Please excuse me as I need to get back to work now. I must let my team know what a fantastic job they are



doing. I can tell it's going to be another fine day.

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**Seth B. Greenwald, PMP** is a Senior Project Manager for TranSystems Corporation. His office, one of 45 nationwide, is located in Norwalk, CT. TranSystems is an architectural/engineering firm specializing in the full spectrum of transportation-related projects; from the design and construction management of roads to bridges to airport terminals to the retail stores and restaurants located within the terminals. Seth can be reached at [sbgreenwald@transystems.com](mailto:sbgreenwald@transystems.com).



## Things That Make Projects Successful

(continued)

Take risks. When you take a risk, stack the deck in your favor. If the benefit outweighs the downside, it's a risk worth taking. In the long run, the odds will be in your favor. If you must take a risk with a big downside, make sure you have a contingency plan with an acceptable outcome.

See the forest and the trees. Execution at the detail level is crucial to project success. But every task must move the project closer to its overall goal or it's not worth doing.

Trust people. Generally, people want to do a good job and don't want to let the team down. Trust your teammates and give them every reason to trust you.

Listen a lot. I never learned anything while I was talking. Information fuels a good decision-making process. The more information you have the better choices you will make.

Never throw solutions at a symptom. Before you take action to resolve a problem, make sure you are addressing the root cause of the problem. You can waste a lot of time trying to solve a symptom. Once you understand the cause, an easy solution is often obvious.

Track your progress. Projects get behind one day at a time. The sooner you know you are behind, the easier it will be to get back on track. A stitch in time saves nine.

Collaborate a lot. Two heads are better than one. Often, four are better than two. We almost always come up with better results/documents/presentations/solutions when a small group has input into the result. The practical limit is six or eight. Beyond that, it's hard to reach consensus.

Learn to live with ambiguity. We love certainty, but sometimes you can't even identify all the variables or conditions. If you wait a week or two, some of the unknowns will disappear from the equation, making the decision or direction easier to determine.



## **RISKY RESOLUTIONS**

(continued)

**Risky Resolution 1: Be more risk-aware.** There are many risks facing us, both personally and professionally, including both threats and opportunities. We might pretend that risk doesn't exist and hope that it goes away, but it would be much better to face the fact that risk is everywhere, and adopt a more proactive approach towards it. Why not *resolve to be more risk-aware this year*, remembering that risk-awareness isn't a technique; it's a state of mind, being alert to risk all the time, seeking out possible uncertain events that could affect achievement of our objectives.

**Risky Resolution 2: Get integrated.** Many people do risk management in isolation, as a bolt-on extra. Usually that's because we're busy doing "real work", and can't spare the time to think about things that might never happen. Risk management becomes a dispensable luxury. But unmanaged risks lead to avoidable problems and reduced benefits. Instead of viewing it as an optional extra, you could *resolve this year to integrate risk management into your normal activities*. Treat it as "real work", and make sure that it fits with your other work. For example, think about risk when you make your initial estimates or draw up the project plan. Use risk assessment as part of your change control process. Make your risk management "built-in not bolt-on" in order to get the full benefit.

**Risky Resolution 3: Take sensible risks.** It's neither possible nor desirable to live life without taking risks. If we tried to be safe all the time, and not expose ourselves to any uncertainty, we would never do anything. Of course we should try to reduce our risk exposure to a level that is acceptable, while not stifling creativity and innovation, but that level is not zero. We need to take some risk, without being irresponsible. Perhaps this year you should *resolve to take more risks, but to do so sensibly*? Sensible risk management means identifying genuine risks, assessing them realistically, and acting appropriately. It means not being paralysed by risk, but taking risk with our eyes open.

**Risky Resolution 4: Don't give up.** Risk doesn't go away just because you've held a workshop and issued a Risk Register. Risk exposure is dynamic and changes frequently – that's why the risk process is iterative. But sometimes we get bored with doing the same things over again. We're fed up with having to update the Risk Register and think of new risks. We'd rather "file and forget". But this is bound to lead to problems. We need to *resolve to keep going*; managing risk is a marathon not a sprint. Try to reduce the process burden as far as possible, making it easy to identify and manage risk. Consider refreshing the risk process with new techniques, or investing in some training. As the risk challenge evolves, so our approach to tackling it needs to be kept up to date.

**Happy New Year!** So as we step into the new year, why not make these *four risky resolutions*, to make your risk management as effective as possible? And if you have trouble remembering them, it might help to think of them like this:

- *Risk-aware*
- *Integrated approach*
- *Sensible risk-taking*
- *Keep going*



To provide feedback on this Briefing Note, or for more details on how to develop effective risk management, [contact the Risk Doctor \(info@risk-doctor.com\)](mailto:info@risk-doctor.com), or [visit the Risk Doctor website \(www.risk-doctor.com\)](http://www.risk-doctor.com).