

Transcription - Maintaining Long Term Project Momentum

Welcome back. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today, I'm going to be in trouble. Our topic is starting a long term project and maintaining momentum. And before we started recording today, I did get into trouble because I am involved in a long-term project and I have lost momentum. The boss was not thrilled with the situation and all of her reactions were exactly what I expected. So now, apparently I have regained momentum because I've got things I have to do in the next 7 days.

Let us first of all, talk about long-term projects. We'll use this one that I am involved in as an example. This is a project that will not come to fruition until 2026, so we are talking 5 years away, but we do need, because it's on a world scale, a world convention, we do need to start our planning now and there will be a lead up event in 2024. First deadline is 2024, the next one's 2026, but before all that happens, there has to be some agreement at a world level to actually let it happen. And so I'm still in that early stage of preparing the proposals that will go to the world body for them to decide or say yes and then I can do or implement the rest of the planning after that. Everything has to be in place before I can do the first step.

Because it is such a long time away and because of all of the other excuses that we can come up with so easily for anything that is a long term, I haven't done anything in the past four weeks towards it bar one email and, of course, when reporting time came today (I knew yesterday, I knew when I looked at what I was doing today) I thought - have to report in and you've done nothing, you know what she'll say. So I went through all of that conversation last night before the meeting today but the momentum gets affected by the things that we stack up ourselves to say this is why I don't need to do anything now, I'll wait until this meeting happens or this information comes. So there's all sorts of ways that we can slow ourselves down. So let's look today, not just at me, but in general terms when you've got a long term project die, you might be managing others (at the moment I'm not managing others, it's just me, so I don't have to engender momentum in anyone else yet). I know when we are starting to do the planning for the next stages, people will still be thinking it's 5 years away, it's 4 years away, there's plenty of time, that awful phrase "there's plenty of time". There isn't. The earlier the planning, getting things in place, the easier it becomes as the date looms closer and closer. Know all of that theory, love all of that theory, not going to live it at the moment, so let's hear what she's got to say.

As Kim just said, it's not just about her, and I don't think she got it all right

anyway, which I will, as usual, correct as I do, as I go along. But, firstly, the most important thing about any project of this size and long term is that it has a proper launch. I'm happy to say that this did happen, so we have to acknowledge that this did happen, the launch did happen. There is a few more things that we can build on that as you go along. In general terms launching the project is letting the key players know that this is big, this is important, this is exciting, this is going to happen. Part of the process, in this example, some is done, some is being done, is identifying your key players, the immediate key players and the extended key players.

In this example they are around the world so it's not that easy. Identify sponsors. Again it could be within the company, it could be within the management team or a combination in a global organization. And if this project is a global one for your company, across the other countries as well, have a steering committee. If necessary, you can have more than one steering committee depending on which angle of the project, the finance aspect, the material aspect etcetera. You could look at those.

It's very, very important that you celebrate and acknowledge the wins. These can be easy wins, they can be small wins, they can be large wins. One of the things that I'm correcting here is the fact that there was quite a lot to celebrate in the time that, Kim, you launched this. I think that is so important that we keep mentioning that and keeping telling. The amount of work that you have done and the steps that you have achieved to now are enormous and they are enormous in that particular short space of time. That is something that unfortunately we are all so keen on keep going, keep going, that we do not acknowledge and celebrate what's good for whoever it is involved in that project, whether they're the bystanders, they're waiting anxiously hearing about your project, whether it is you as the leader of the project, whether it is you as an organization or the team working on the project. So that, I can't push that high enough.

The other one is maintaining yourself. As a leader of any kind of project, look after yourself. I know you're doing that, you have a routine in the morning, you're looking after whether you're getting enough exercise, reading whatever and I really think that is important for anything to keep your energy up, to keep your mindset right, to get enough sleep, etc, etc.

When things are going through the projects, there is no project worth doing that does not have obstacles. There is no project worth doing that doesn't have frustration and sometimes you feel, you're going two steps forward and five back and that is the nature of some of the projects. Maintaining a positive tone even

though that you feel like it's all too hard, is important and do that by being genuine and calling on the positiveness. In some cases, I would say, manage conflict is way too hard but what I want to say is, when people are exhibiting various points of view, it's really good and it's really healthy to do so. However, when it turns into a win-lose situation, you need to manage that conflict, either personally or through another person or another method, people that will listen to that and will dissolve the conflict by showing respect to both point of views and making sure that people are being recognized and appreciated, but also deescalate and stop the negativeness spreading.

Miscommunication. I hate miscommunication because it happens and it destroys a lot. I don't want to go there but even on the Covid vaccine, in this environment, you have people who are supposed to know better who are in a position to speak only facts, don't. So be aware of that, don't get angry, just give the facts again and again and again and again. So people will see, if you're talking financial backing for it, if you're talking technical, get your technical experts to articulate and explain so people who are the ones of the authority on this subject are the ones that will tell as it is with the genuine information and not that misinformation from people who are either scared of the project, anti project or whatever it is.

Losing momentum can happen. It can happen, it's long, we've got other things, some people are working on more than just that project, as you are. In that case, every now and then you've got to breed the sense of urgency. It might seem like two years ago away, but that would be here quicker than what we think, we're already in 2021. The other one is, get someone else to give a presentation on it. Now they're hearing you, you're doing really well. Then get someone who specialises in a certain aspect, get them to communicate that, whether it is by teleconferencing, by paper note, or whatever your method is at the moment, get them to do that. Have those one on one calls and catch ups in between and thereabouts.

But most important, is celebrating every bit of a achievement, each step of the way even if it's big or small. Then have the obstacles turn into a number of opportunities by saying what is the hardest thing about that? Acknowledge it, say right, we've done this before somebody will say, we've done this before and it didn't work, in fact it cost us this, it cost us that. Great, thanks for sharing that. Now let's have a look at it and say, what is different now to what was then, what do we have now that we didn't have then or vice versa? Let's look at how many things can we come up with. People are innovative, they get energised, once one person will start the ball rolling, then another. If needs be, go back to what I

said before, say this does sound a little hard, why don't we get a couple of people to work just on that for the next week, the ins and outs of this issue and at least half a dozen solutions. Just keep reminding yourself as well as the people that you're working with, what is the reason we doing this? What's that? There was a good reason otherwise you wouldn't have started it. What is the end game here? When is this going to happen? It's going to be great because if we don't do it, it's going to feel bad or is it going to even make it worse than feeling we just didn't do it?

What is your responsibility as a group to maintain that for the future and for the future of all the people in this environment? Whether it's a project for the business or a project for a club or whatever it is.

What comes out of that for me, in the review sense, is that the important part of the launch is to make it a launch that encourages some sort of feeling across the board. And if, as in my case, that comes as a video, that you got back and you watch that video yourself. But also I think that sometimes in looking at the broader picture, in looking at the end result, we do a very broad plan and so when we look at the plan, it's these major steps, these milestones, that we have to achieve and there's nothing in between. We haven't broken it down into the steps. I think that one of the solutions for me with this project would have been (and should be from now on), yes I've got the milestones and they're very clear but they need to be broken down almost into the weekly tasks. So that every week I've got something that I have to do and that will automatically keep the momentum going without me having to think about how or what should I do this week or what else needs to be done? If I've got that set down and I've thought about it enough, then I can break it down into those very, very small components, that is momentum, that is doing something. The when you get to the milestone and you look back at it and you think, it is self feeding in that sense, is that if you're in a position where you've taken on a large project, break it down to the smallest possible element that you can. If you are like me, that's what you need to do to keep yourself going.

Well see, the project plan is really what you're saying isn't it? Breaking it up into minute parts, action by whom, by when. The other thing is that's really good about it is it shows up dependency. Dependency says, what you are doing, you can't do this without doing that first because that's dependent. Like any good project plan, the better you fill in your plan then better results you're going to get and follow-up and you know exactly what stopped it or what derailed it.

I think for me, the failing was that initially it was a long term project. Long amount

of time that I had for the project. And I knew the major milestones, I was lazy and didn't break it down any further. And so, that meant that I got to this point in this stage of the project where I know what the next milestone is, I know that that can't happen, really, until end of February/March sometime. So, all of January, I said, well, everyone's on holiday, there's nothing else that needs to be done but as I thought about today I occurred to me that there are things that need to be done and I'll have to be doing them. So the momentum has returned!

It was simply thinking about the two of us working through what needed to be done, the two of us coming out with what's the next step so the momentum is ignited again. My recommendation, based on experience, is if you've got a long term big project and you know major milestones, break them down right at the start into whatever you can that fits into that category. So that there is always something that you can look at and make a decision on. You are always moving towards the end goal.

I'm not finished. I also still want to emphasise that what we are missing here is, not what you could have done differently and what you are doing going forward, which is fantastic, but I want to repeat when you mentioned didn't do something for a couple of weeks, or whatever it is, that's because you've done enough work in another two weeks before that for four weeks ahead. And I'm not going to keep quiet about when you have achieved quite a lot and you're not telling yourself and marking that. It is not just the pat-on-the-back. It's practical and recognition of the fact that what's been achieved, shows you where you're at and how much you already achieved and where you're going. I think, other than that, I would just like to say celebrate what you've done, recognize what you've done, and others that helped you with it, even with the speed of the response of some of those people who would normally sleep on it because it's January or whatever, that you got some responses, which is really good. Again, celebrate a little bit as you go along.

It keeps the fire burning, which is what momentum is. I appreciate that there are lots of you out there with long term projects and who do find it a challenge to keep going when you reach a hiatus, when you think that there's nothing that can be done at this point in time. So I hope that our discussion today has given you some things to think about and maybe some tips that you can implement with your long-term project. But for now I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.