

Project management certified

BrenDaniel Productions and the Chamber help members see the big picture **By Erin Elaine Casey**

Big projects tend to have many moving parts. When you're in charge of all those parts, with responsibility for an entire project, the need to stay on track and be organized is obvious. But how many of us actually have the training and skills we need to ensure our ventures happen on time and on budget with buy-in from colleagues and partners — all the while managing risk?

That's where project management training and certification come in. What is project management? In simple terms, it's the discipline of planning, running, monitoring, and controlling a project from start to finish. It's the processes, methods, knowledge, skills, and experience you need to meet the objectives of a time-limited undertaking such as a building project, sales target, software rollout, or product design.

Brenda Fay started BrenDaniel Productions Corp with her husband Daniel in 1995. Together, they provide project management and leadership training to organizations worldwide, including Electronic Data Systems Canada, Nortel Networks (Canada and UK), Motorola (USA and Germany), Alcatel, the Canadian Department of National Defence, the Province of Nova Scotia, and the City of Fresno. They have also trained thousands of project management staff in China.

Brenda believes that professionals from all walks of life benefit from project management training. "There's lots of different ways people can work better themselves and with their teams," she explains. "It's a best practice body of knowledge that can help you ensure your project aligns with your company values. You get agreement on priorities, commit to a schedule, manage risk, keep your plan updated, and finish your project on time."

BrenDaniel is a sponsor of the Halifax Chamber's new initiative, Grow Halifax, which will help local entrepreneurs access the resources they need to overcome barriers to organizational growth. The goal is to increase the capacity, quality, and skills of our workforce to compete in the global economy. "It's been great for us to work with the Chamber because they have a broader reach than we do," says Brenda.



Photos: Joseph Robichaud/Tanglewood Studio

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— Paul Behner, Owner, Greentree Project Management

As part of that sponsorship, BrenDaniel is offering the Advanced Project Leadership Series (APLS) next spring. The weekly program is aimed at senior project managers and leaders, and is focused on discussion and sharing of best practices for leading big projects.

BrenDaniel offers ongoing courses in project management fundamentals, project management for entrepreneurs, project management certification preparation, and monthly breakfast learning sessions. This isn't the first time BrenDaniel has partnered with the Chamber. Brenda and her team offered Project Management Professional (PMP) training courses last year as part of All Ships Rise.

"People feel invigorated when they take it, because they can back up their decisions with evidence," says Brenda.

Karen Saunders is director of sales with SolutionInc, a global internet gateway provider and managed services company that offers solutions for managing high demand public Wi-Fi in places like

shopping malls, parks, airports, hotels, and hospitals. She took project management training through the Chamber last fall, and hasn't looked back.

"In my job, I have to be extremely organized because I have a lot of moving parts," explains Karen. "About 10 years ago I worked with a certified PMP, and she showed me the value of project management. We rolled out a methodology for the company that related to software development, and that helped streamline the process. We decided to use it for customer projects as well, and it put everybody on the same page, allowed everybody to be using the same words and thinking in the same manner."

Although Karen had always wanted to do a project management course, "it was really a matter of time and money," but through the Chamber program she was able to get government funding. "The Chamber membership really paid off!" she says, smiling.

Ahmed Yaiesh is the Technical Sales Coordinator in the Dartmouth office of

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Xylem, a leading global water technology company with operations in more than 150 countries. His office’s main line of business is supplying pumps and station equipment to wastewater pumping stations. “In a sense, I’m not a project manager, more like a coordinator, but the skills are really useful,” says Ahmed. “Those skills will help you with planning, communication, and stakeholder management.”

After taking project management training through the Chamber last fall, Ahmed earned his PMP certification in March. “It’s helped me a lot, in terms of understanding cost, scope, and time. This really matters in the projects I work on. Understanding cost while considering product quality versus grade, staying on scope, and managing time effectively. I deal with a lot of suppliers and customers. Project changes affect

everything, and you can lose track — you’ve got to keep everyone in the loop.”

Both Karen and Ahmed know that having project management training makes them better team members, too. “Those skills make me more effective and more organized. You monitor and control the project, making sure everything gets delivered on time, nothing slips up, and communicate changes to your customers.”

Karen agrees. “Happier customers, happier employees. Everyone knows the plan, and they aren’t guessing what they should be doing next. Everyone knows what’s expected of them and when it’s due. It really lends to the success of our company.”

As a construction project manager and owner of Greentree Project Management, Paul Behner uses the principles he learned from Brenda in every aspect of his work. A former private construction contractor, he started noticing the differences between well-run ventures and ones that were missing the key ingredients of good management.

“I come in and complement what a developer is doing, with a specialized project management approach,” says Paul. “Land development is one of my skills. Project management fundamentals can break a whole project down so it is spread out and clearly understood. All the risks, costs, and scope are laid out. There is nothing that is not examined before the project starts, after the project starts, and during the entire lifespan, to ensure that the product or project is at its best as it enters the built environment.”



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Paul led the Dartmouth Crossing project, and describes it as very successful and fast-paced. “It required a good deal of expertise from a lot of people, and as the integrator of that project I had to pull that all together. The focus of the care and attention was on the project, not individual agendas.”

One of his latest major assignments

involved getting a large land development project back on track that had been limping along for eight years. Paul was hired to assess the situation and make recommendations on how the project could gain traction. “There was a lack of understanding of what their role is as a developer,” he says, “which is to deliver the project. You begin with the

vision, then build the strategy and then the plan. I put in a project management office, systems, plan, built accountability, engaged all the stakeholders — all the steps in project management training. More progress was made in 14 months than in the previous eight years.”

There is no question that putting project management skills to work pays off. Karen Saunders talks about a huge project for a hotel company that spanned 10 provinces. “We realized we needed a project manager to run it,” she says.

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“He came in, a certified PMP, and he set that project on fire. The customer was extremely happy, we made some really good margin because we completed everything on time, met deadlines, and made fewer mistakes. Before, we dove in and halfway through wondered where we were. This allowed us to step back and do it right the first time.”

PMP certification is granted through the US-based Project Management Institute and is a recognized international standard. “People get it for different reasons,” says Brenda. “One is to improve how they manage projects, and another is to increase compensation. If you’re looking for a project management job, the PMP sets you apart.”

To get your PMP certification, you need certain qualifications: a university degree plus three years of experience in the last eight managing projects. Without a degree, you’ll need five years in the last eight. “Some people take this course because it’s a more senior course, but don’t go on to write the exam,” Brenda explains. “When I give the course, I find that people get something from every session that they can apply to their work.”

All the participants concede that the 35-hour PMP training is challenging and covers a great deal of material, and the certification exam is hard. But they all agree it’s worth every hour of class and study, whether you write your exam right away or not.

The hardest part? “It’s so comprehensive. There’s so much material — it’s a science and an art,” says Paul Behner. “Experience is invaluable in project management, but being able to leverage that experience through a project management program, that’s the sweet spot.” A couple of years after taking the course, Paul is still involved in a study group and learns something new every time he reviews the material.

“Project management ensures that how something is designed is how it will be built,” says Paul. Sounds simple, right? But anyone who’s worked on a large project or in a complex environment knows how hard it can be to get everyone pulling on the same oar.

Project management principles and practices help us accomplish great things: take on bigger ventures, make fewer mistakes, work better as a team, and earn more money both for ourselves and our companies. Most of all, project management helps us grasp the big picture and understand not just what we’re doing, but why. ♦



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