

**Ten Commandments of Project Management:  
A brief guide to the art of righteous project management  
By Robin Hornby, PMP (Book review)**

## Introduction

As you might expect from the title, this little book makes a play on the biblical Ten Commandments. As the author states in the Introduction:

"This book was written to help project managers deal with tough situations by identifying behaviors that will get a project out of trouble, or will avoid trouble in the first place. It is not intended as an introduction to the discipline of project management; a glance along the shelves of the business section in your local bookstore will present many opportunities to fill that need."<sup>1</sup>

So, each chapter expresses and then explains what the author believes to be a "righteous truth". The author goes on to explain:

"The ideas, conclusions and recommendations in this book evolved during a 30-year career in project management. I have tested and adopted my own advice and when courage and conviction were also present, success followed. Every experience, good or bad, teaches a lesson, and I have selected the more compelling incidents to dramatize the main messages. I believe the examples are sufficiently general to allow interpretation by any reader, although they originate from the discipline of Information Technology (IT)."<sup>2</sup>

Robin Hornby also observes that:

"The rules engraved on tablets of stone and brought down from Mount Sinai were adopted by Moses and his followers out of enlightened self-interest (and perhaps fear of the Lord). These rules laid down a framework for a stable, open and manageable society, but they did not blueprint the constitutional building blocks. Stretching my analogy, the premise of this book is that project management is as much *art* as *science*."

Robin hopes that the contents of his book will resonate with your experience and inspire you to deliver a more "righteous project".

## Book Structure

So, using the analogy of the Ten Commandments, Robin has distilled successful behaviors into "ten nuggets of advice" as culled from his experience. Each behavior is illustrated with examples from real project situations.

Following a brief introduction, the Ten Commandments, and hence the ten chapters are as follows:

1. Thou Shalt Speak Thy Truth
2. Though Shalt Not Say 'Yes' in Haste
3. Thou Shalt Lead Thy Sponsor Down the Path of Reality
4. Thou Shalt Not Present a Single Point Estimate
5. Thou Shalt Pay for Quality, Just as Surely as Thou Payest for Thy Errors
6. Though Shalt Not Avoid Conflict
7. Thou Shalt Put Thy Stake in the Sand
8. Thou Shalt Not Plan The Unknowable
9. Thou Shalt Rid thyself of Incompetence
10. Thou Shalt Not Assume That Which is False

Here Endeth The Lesson

To lighten the text, each chapter is illustrated with sketches and diagrams.

## Content

The following are examples of issues with schedules and estimates. Chapter 1 includes the following section:

"Alice in Wonderland

On some projects, stakeholders have conflicting notions about key aspects of the project. This is not just a simple misunderstanding, or a failure to communicate; it is usually the result of ambiguity from the start, allowing different stakeholders to interpret the project in ways that favor their specific position. Because this seems to resolve a crisis and allows the project to proceed, there is no imperative to resolve the ambiguity. Inevitably the crisis is only deferred, recurring later with more significant consequences.

A simple and classic example is the mythical schedule. A mythical schedule is one decreed by a sponsor and acquiesced to by the project manager, but one that cannot be fathomed by any project team member. More prevalent in some corporate cultures than others, the team begins a death march during which the project manager silences any complaint or dispute. Common exhortations include the dictatorial declaration, "The targets are set and it's our job to meet them," as well as the more sympathetic (but equally useless), "Do the best you can." This simple illustration usually has a complex political genesis; however, it does not excuse the project manager from slipping into Wonderland."<sup>3</sup>

Chapter 4 illustrates the subject of Single Point Estimates with the following dialogue:

*Client:* 'Hi, thanks for coming over to review your proposal. Please take a seat.'

*Consultant:* 'Thanks. We made some interesting assumptions as we went through the estimates, and I wanted the opportunity to ensure we're all on the right track. We certainly want this project to be a success.'

*Client:* 'Yes, of course, so do we. But you won't be doing this project if you can't show a bit more respect for our budget!'

*Consultant:* 'Well, we've been quite careful to scope this and our local engineers understand your requirements quite well. With the assumptions and risks that we identified, we are prepared to stand behind the fixed price quote you requested. The bottom line was \$250K, plus some expenses we can talk about. We understood that within those limits the project showed an excellent cost/benefit and would be approved by the steering committee.'

*Client:* 'I won't be taking this to the steering committee unless you can justify this price. We weren't expecting anything like this.'

*Consultant:* 'I'm sorry you're surprised. Last week we reviewed the way our estimates were coming in with your team leader. We told him to expect a range of \$230K to \$280K.'

*Client:* 'Joe doesn't understand this company's budgetary process. I have to justify these numbers and they don't fit the departmental allocation.'

*Consultant:* 'What would you like me to do?'

*Client:* 'Well, we have to go through the detail, and strip out what's not needed.'

*Consultant:* 'Actually, we've already done that based on the need/want/wish requirements listed in Appendix A. The estimate is our best shot at making this project a success for both parties.'

*Client:* 'Sure. So let's see the estimate.'

*Consultant:* 'The problem is, the estimate is very detailed, and because of uncertainty, I'm sure every line item is open to discussion and possibly disagreement. When we started, you asked us to consider this a fixed-price deal and we agreed, which means we are carrying a fair amount of risk. We rely on our aggregated estimates to work out fairly, even though in the detail some may be higher and some may be lower. Your evaluation of our bid should be based on whether you expect to receive value from our price.'

*Client (irritated):* 'My evaluation is based upon whether your estimate is sensible. Now let's have a look or we'll have to put this out to tender.'

*Consultant (reluctantly):* 'Sure, I think I have the details here.'

*Client (studies):* 'You've allowed excessive time for testing. There is no need for all that project management. Our team leader can take care of most of that stuff plus you've got some padding here!'

*Consultant:* 'Our test time is based on several very similar projects where that amount of effort was required. We must have a project manager to be responsible for our work if we are carrying the risk of a fixed price. The 'padding' is a contingency number that we include in all our fixed price work to account for a portion of the risk you are asking us to assume. It's based on statistical theory arising from the S curve relationship between the estimate and the . . .

*Client:* 'Take it out!'

*Consultant:* 'As an alternative, why don't we consider a time and materials approach?'

What is happening here, of course, is a setup for negotiation. This can be very intimidating for a project manager and in a commercial environment the sales representative and the project manager need to have their roles fully worked out in order to cope with this. On their feet, in front of a customer, is not the time for any irresponsible misstep."<sup>4</sup>

We are confident that our readers will be familiar with these scenarios, as we ourselves have been up these avenues many times.

### ***General observations***

The content of *Ten Commandments of Project Management* provides a good reminder of typical everyday challenges that the project manager often faces, and what to avoid – if possible! And throughout, author Robin Hornby attempts to provide experience based advice, and demonstration of proven – as well as some innovative – project management techniques to help meet and overcome the challenges identified. The book is simple and easy to read and considering the price of only \$25, shipping and tax included, is good value.

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<sup>1</sup> Hornby, R., *Ten Commandments of Project Management*, Tempest Management Inc., Calgary, Alta, Canada, 2004, p1

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p2

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p11

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp74-76