

Green Bean PM

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How should new project managers learn from the 'Old beans'

When my kids were young they loved to play one particular game at the annual birthday parties. This game involved 'Beans' – all of the kids standing ready and waiting for instructions and then the cry would go up of 'Beans' and the game would begin.

'Runner beans' as a call would mean that everyone had to run on the spot. 'Jumping beans' meant, naturally, a lot of jumping up and down in one place. 'French beans' meant a chorus of 'Ooh la la's' and waving of arms in a posh French way. And 'Baked beans' meant ... well you know kids so I am sure that you can work that one out for yourself. It goes without saying this is the one 'Bean' that they loved the most.

Then at the end a final call would be 'Human beans' and the kids were back to normal human beings (or back to kids anyway which meant even more noise and dancing around and general excitement).

At my new company I hear a lot about 'Green beans' and the challenge of inducting and developing raw talent in to the organization. So when the call goes up of 'Green beans' for project managers what should this mean?

I think that key to having a successful induction of the 'Project beans' will include:

Give them a safe place to start

Projects are, by their very nature, tricky beasts and for a 'newbie' to learn the practical skills of project management we should ensure that they enter the PM world in a controlled way. Hopefully being handed a new project to lead and being told to 'get on with it' (as I was when I became a PM) is long gone.

Rather we should allow the 'Green beans' to experience project reality by taking up a small part in another project managers project, and watching and learning and getting involved in a small way.

In addition, if there are project reviews, health checks, and retrospectives taking place (and I really hope that there are) then this is another great entry experience for the young ones to see and learn.

Another safe(r) environment might be internal projects – rather than external customer facing ones.

Key is to make the environment of learning a safe one.

Give them a friendly place to work

Where should they work and report when they first start out? Well don't leave them out in the cold and without peers and project professionals around them. If you have a project practise then this is the place to nurture those 'beans'.

Make it easy for them to ask the questions that they will need to ask and make it easy for them to see experienced project managers in action.

We all know that there is a world of difference between theory and practice so give them the support they need to move away from the theory.

Key is to make it easy for them to find out all of the stuff that will need to find out.

Give them a helping hand

Appoint a mentor from out there in project management land who will be there to listen to them from time to time and gently point them in the right direction when they need help – such a person will be invaluable to the ‘beans’ in the early days of being a project manager.

Encourage them to make the effort to look outside your organization and connect to some truly wonderful project managers and experts out there on the www. There is a huge amount of advice and guidance through local project management groups, through conferences and meetings, through the online discussions and blogs, and lots more. (It may be in this area the ‘Green’ ones might have the upper hand on us ‘Grey’ ones since all this social connectivity is second nature to them).

Key is to build the best possible network for now and the future and to use it wisely.

A final thought

And a final word for the ‘Green beans’ themselves.

Be enthusiastic at all times. Trust me; project management is a great place to be right now, you probably won’t be able to stop yourself smiling.

So when the cry goes up of ‘Project beans’ join in all that noise and excitement along with all the other ‘Project beans’ (We will be shouting and dancing as best as our ‘Old bean’ legs will let us).

I kind of wish I was ‘Green’ all over again.

About Peter Taylor

Peter is a dynamic and commercially astute professional who has achieved notable success in Project Management.

His background is in project management across three major business areas over the last 26 years, MRP/ERP systems with various software houses and culminating in his current role with Infor, Business Intelligence (BI) with Cognos, and product lifecycle management (PLM) with Siemens. He has spent the last 7 years leading PMOs and developing project managers and is now focusing on project based services development with Infor.



He is also an accomplished communicator and leader and is a professional speaker as well as the author of ‘*The Lazy Project Manager*’ (Infinite Ideas) and ‘*Leading Successful PMOs*’ (Gower).

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