

Personal Recovery: Using Project Management to Survive Personal Disaster

By Michelle LaBrosse, PMP, Chief Cheetah, Cheetah Learning

Life throws us all curve balls. From needing to care for someone you love to dealing with personal crises or emergencies, sometimes it can feel like life is spinning out of control.

If you've been there before or you're there right now, here are a few ways that Project Management can help you to transform a disaster into a detour – just another path that you're going down.

Key Questions to Ask Yourself

How much time can you reasonably spend on your current project or on your professional commitments?

Assess what is realistic for you to achieve or accomplish knowing what is on your plate professionally and personally. Look at your challenge as a project. Think about what you have to manage and how you can do what you have to do well. Sometimes, you have to make a decision to let some of your responsibilities go or make a decision for your career to take a back seat. A good project manager knows when to delegate to other team members or to others in your group of family and friends.

How much should you disclose to your project team or peers at work?

We live in a culture of reality TV and talk shows where people disclose the intimate details of their lives, so we often become desensitized to what is appropriate to share or disclose. If you're going through a divorce or if a family member has passed away, you should be honest about what's happening, but be wary of unloading on your team members. If you're dealing with an emotionally charged situation, set time aside for counseling. It's emotionally draining when people treat their coworkers as therapists.

Do you have a succession plan?

Leaders know that part of their job is cultivating a culture of leadership. Part of your job is to know who will follow you and who can fill your shoes. In an emergency situation, it's a relief when you know there is a leader that you've mentored who can step in and keep your project moving without skipping a beat.

Do you have a contingency plan?

Before disaster strikes, you should have a contingency plan in place. Know what you would do if you or anyone on your team was suddenly unavailable. Have a team structure with people who can back each other up. The power of teams is that you can build redundancy into them.

As a team leader or team member, sometimes you're not dealing with your own issues, but the challenges of those around you. Your actions during difficult times speak volumes. Leaders are often born when the going gets tough. So, here are some rules of the road, when a team member is tackling a life challenge.

Set up boundaries

Don't let someone's personal problem sidetrack every meeting or conference call. It's important to let people talk about what's happening, but set clear boundaries about when it's appropriate.

Focus on the future

Don't become Dr. Phil and assume that everyone likes to talk about their personal problems at work. Often people return to work soon after a crisis because they see it as a safe haven. Give people the space to move on. Talk about the future, and let them see what's ahead instead of focusing only on what is behind them.

Have counseling resources available

Many companies now have counseling resources available to their staff members when they need them. This signals that you care about your team's personal health and well-being, and also that you want them to be effective. It's difficult for people to be successful at work if they are distracted by a personal issue.

Know when and how to let go

This is one of the toughest things to do as a manager. It's tough to let someone go when you know they have gone through a difficult time, but if someone is not performing well for a long period of time, you can't let them drag the team down. Communicate clearly, and develop policies that clearly explain your norms and expectations, as well as the implications when those expectations are not met.

Lead with compassion

Whether you are going through a challenging time or someone on your team is, you'll never go wrong if you act with compassion. Compassion is not about ignoring what is happening. It's about recognizing it and coming up with solutions that work for the situation and support yourself or those around you.

So, the next time a curve ball comes your way, you don't have to duck. Grab your project management glove and face the ball head on. With your project management skills, there is nothing you can't do.

About the Know How Network and Cheetah Learning

The Know How Network is a monthly column written by Michelle LaBrosse, the founder and Chief Cheetah of Cheetah Learning. Distributed to hundreds of newsletters and media outlets around the world, the Know How Network brings the promise, purpose and passion of Project Management to people everywhere. Visit www.cheetahlearning.com to learn more about Cheetah PM, the fastest way to learn about Project Management and get your PMP. You can also get your career in gear with [CheetahWare](#), free Project Management tools from Cheetah Learning.

About the Author



Michelle LaBrosse is the founder and Chief Cheetah of [Cheetah Learning](#). An international expert on accelerated learning and Project Management, she has grown Cheetah Learning into the market leader for Project Management training and professional development. In 2006, The Project Management Institute, www.pmi.org, selected Michelle as one of the 25 Most Influential Women in Project Management in the World, and only one of two women selected from the training and education industry. Michelle is a graduate of the Harvard Business School's Owner & President Management program for entrepreneurs, and is the author of [Cheetah Project Management](#) and [Cheetah Negotiations](#).