

4 Traps to Learning Project Management

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By Bob Makarowski

Going back to school to revitalize your career may be crossing your mind this time of year. But in a burst of enthusiasm, missteps can sometimes occur before and after deciding to refresh your skills. Project management and its software tools is a popular educational choice. The skills are useful across a wide variety of industries and can be integrated into your personal life as well. But here are some pitfalls that can prevent you from getting the most out of your educational dollar.

Trap 1: Too Much Too Soon. If you've been out of school more than a few years, don't jump into the deep end of the pool before you're ready. Over-extending yourself by signing up for six full-semester length classes could lead to an expensive failure once you see how much time the homework, class work and group projects add to your existing schedule. Instead, consider signing up for one of Baruch's Notch Up Your Professional Know How seminars. These are a series of one- and two-day workshops that not only increase your skills and marketability, but serve as a gentle re-entry into more comprehensive programs. If you've already sampled the one-day classes and want to continue broadening your expertise, take a look at Baruch's Project Management Certificate program. Taught by experienced professionals, these classes cover the many facets of successfully managing projects across a broad spectrum of organizations.

Trap 2: Flying Solo. If you like the idea of buying some books and learning on your own, you're in good company. Abraham Lincoln, David Bowie and Malcolm X were all successful autodidacts. But before you go on a book-buying binge, check out your bookshelf and take a close look at the business and technology texts you already own. Notice their bindings. Do they have creases and folds past the first two chapters? If they don't, you probably didn't get too far on your last do-it-yourself initiative. Self study takes an enormous amount of time, and a good deal of undisturbed concentration, both of which are difficult to come by in an age of twitter updates and vibrating blackberries. Instead of taking the self-study route, how about participating in live classes taught by seasoned industry veterans? In addition to the guidance and expertise instructors provide, interacting with like-minded adults in a classroom increases the amount of information you absorb, accelerates your learning rate, and increases the ease with which you'll be able to use what you've learned.

Trap 3: Self Invalidation. Criticizing yourself for not knowing more about your current vocation is another trap. Don't let it discourage you from signing up for an advanced class in your current field, or a new workshop in an unfamiliar field. When you enroll, do so with the frame of mind that you are broadening your expertise and improving your strengths. As you attend classes and study the texts, ask yourself: "How can I use this to perform my job more effectively?" Project management is a popular field of study and regardless of what you're currently doing for a living; you have managed projects in your life. Organizing office parties or trips to an amusement park all contain elements of a project. But by participating in the Baruch Project Management Certificate program, you will become a more competent project manager. You will learn methods and strategies to successfully navigate larger projects with fixed budgets, complex resources, and narrow timetables.

Trap 4: False Confidence. A person can be over-confident about their own skills and sit through an entire course with the complete certainty that they don't need to work because they already know it all. This fixed idea will act as a barrier to absorbing new information. Although this trap generally occurs when someone else is paying for the class, false confidence can also occur on a smaller scale when a topic is covered that you have already studied. If you catch yourself veering into this state of mind, look for new ways to use the material you are revisiting. Speak with your instructor, and consider bouncing ideas off other students. Communication breathes new life into review material.

There are other barriers to study that you may encounter and want to Google. But exercising alert observation and focused persistence, you are sure to fortify your skills and refresh your career outlook.

Bob Makarowski has taught at Baruch College for the past 17 years and worked in the information technology for over 27 years. Certified by both Novell and Microsoft, he specializes in data center design and management, network and systems analysis, and software test design. Bob has trained all levels of users in the use of front and back-office applications. His expertise includes the turn around of data processing functions within organizations, automation planning and strategy, as well as change management. Mr. Makarowski has designed workshops and written technical procedure guides for end-users and technical personnel. His clients have included JPMorganChase, Citicorp, Nomura Securities, and Standard and Poors.