

I thought being a Sponsor was easy until I became one...



By Victoria Haney, PMP

I've been a project manager for nearly 20 years and now teach people how to manage their projects using a combination of reality and PMI® processes. During my training, I continually hear students say "my sponsor doesn't have a clue and keeps trying to do things the old way" (or some similar variation.) These comments caused me to think that the sponsor was someone that had to be 'dealt with' rather than thinking about the project from the sponsor's point of view.

Recently my daughter announced that she's getting married next year. She is great at planning and organizing projects for her theatre groups, college friends and even work events. After all, she was raised by me, a great project manager, some of it was bound to rub off, right?

As any good project manager knows, **sometimes you need to let your sponsor know what their responsibilities are.** So, my project-manager-bride-daughter informed me 1) exactly which parts of the wedding are the bride's parents financial responsibility; 2) that I'll be expected to help out with the shower; 3) that I'll get to go with them to pick out dresses for the bride and bride's maids and 4) that her brides maids will be sleeping at my house the night before the wedding. That's all, no ambiguity about what my role was going to be in this wedding. My role in this project was defined, I was the *sponsor*. **All of a sudden I've been thrust into the sponsor role rather than the project manager role.** So I started a list of all the things I've been learning as a sponsor:

1. Budgets are difficult to nail down. No matter how much I try to push for estimates for things, they still change, or there is a piece that we didn't think of when we were putting our original estimate together.
2. We have a fixed end date, so the schedule shouldn't slip – right? Well, if any of them slip, I could be responsible for paying extra to do things at the last minute or to expedite things.
3. The sponsor needs to keep their fingers out of the day-to-day activities and let the team do what they believe is right. I know better than to try to micromanage the team because "Bride-zilla" will emerge. Bride-zilla is much worse than a project manager that is missing deadlines, but the crazed response is pretty much the same.

4. I do have to encourage my daughter to deliver a great wedding, without turning into the 'mom-zilla' or, 'sponsor-zilla'. If I dictate what has to be done, we'll never get to see her great creativity. (Is it a little too creative to have the bride wear bejeweled Chuck Taylor® All Star tennis shoes?) From what I've seen, it looks like the wedding is going to be completely different than what I had in mind, but a wonderful event.
5. It's tough when you've done this in the past to let go and let someone else take the lead. (I've worked with sponsors that used to be developers and they still believe they can do it quicker and better than the real development team.) Project sponsors need to let their project managers shine. They must assume the role of decision-maker not dictator, or else they'll be butting heads over everything.
6. As a sponsor you have to be firm with the project team so that they don't go over budget or take too long to get things together, but you must accept when the team shows you a completely different way to accomplish something. I was ready to hire a photographer for the wedding, instead, Erin suggested an alternative that will help her friend add to her photography portfolio. So, we're flying in her friend who is an excellent, budding photographer. The cost of her ticket and hotel room is much less than the cost of a regular wedding photographer.
7. The sponsor needs to approve and review things quickly so that the team stays motivated and moving forward on the project. Like picking out dresses on the one day that I was so sick I could hardly move, but I was there to approve, smile and frown as needed.

The planning and the little things that need to be done are getting done with the greatest of ease. So far her CPI is about .98, but her SPI is about 1.10. If the progress to date on this project is any indication, the wedding will be a great one (a little over budget, but great.)

Being the mother of the bride is a fun experience. Seeing myself as the sponsor has allowed me to accept the odd things like... all the five brides made will have visible tattoos, one of which is a gun! I now realize that the sponsor role is more difficult than I originally thought. Fun, but difficult!

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