Special, large, or time-sensitive projects can be challenging. Managing a complex issue such as organizing an event or streamlining a work process may be daunting, especially when added on top of your work group’s usual responsibilities.

While some managers have special training in project management, it may be a steep learning curve for others. Regardless of your background or the size of the project, these steps may make the process easier:

- **Understand your goal.** Having a firm grasp of the desired outcome is key. When you are assigned a project, ask questions that help determine what you are expected to achieve and how it fits into the “big picture.” Before getting underway, research the topic thoroughly and talk to fellow managers or staff members with specialized knowledge about how they would approach the task.

- **Break the project into smaller steps.** Create a detailed breakdown of what tasks will be necessary to achieve the identified goal. While you may be able to take some preliminary steps toward this on your own, it is often helpful to assemble your team and solicit their input before committing to a sequence of smaller tasks.

- **Assemble your team.** Assigning the right people to the right tasks can make all the difference. Evaluate the abilities of team members to determine what roles would best fit different skill sets. If you are missing essential capabilities, consult with other teams for assistance or determine if there is room in the budget for a freelancer or outside consultant. After assembling your team, listen to their input and give them as much autonomy as possible in how tasks are accomplished. It’s important to allow people with special skills to contribute based on their best practices.

- **Create a timeline.** Set deadlines for both necessary sub-tasks and the achievement of the overall project goals.
of the overall goal, while also building in a cushion to allow for unexpected delays. Look for ways to coordinate the completion of different tasks so the project can maintain continued momentum. If your team is juggling this project with day-to-day responsibilities, try to set aside protected time that can be devoted to accomplishing project tasks.

- **Provide structure.** Make certain everyone knows what they are supposed to do, who they need to work with, and when they need to have various tasks completed. Consider creating a spreadsheet or utilizing project management software to track your team’s progress.

- **Communicate.** It’s important to communicate often and clearly. During the early stages, assemble your team for meetings on a regular basis and use email to keep them informed of issues that arise between meetings. As you move deeper into the project and team members split off into individual tasks, have more frequent small group or one-on-one meetings and save full team meetings for a bi-weekly or monthly recap. In addition, it is important to update stakeholders in the project on a frequent basis, both to keep them apprised of your progress and to obtain feedback on what has been accomplished to date.

- **Document.** A large project is like a machine — it has many moving parts, and not all of them are visible. Keeping notes on decisions made and actions taken will help you track important details. Documenting will also make it easier for you to add a new or replacement team member into the mix.

- **Learn to roll with the punches.** Large projects often have a learning curve, and the best-laid plans may be subject to revision. Develop contingency plans

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**Reading Recommendations**

If you would like more information about project management, the following books may be of interest:


*Project Management: How to Be a Successful Project Manager* by D Williams, Amazon Digital Services, Inc., 2014.
for delays due to budgetary concerns, technology complications, mid-course corrections, or the loss of a key contributor. Be open to reorganizing the project to streamline processes.

• **Stay on top of trends.** If you are implementing a new technology or work method, it’s important to stay abreast of updates that could have an impact on your plans. While it is important to remain on track, changes in processes or technology sometimes outpace the end product, rendering it outdated or obsolete prior to launch. Consequently, it is important to monitor trends in this regard.

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**How Do I Say That**

If a member of your project team isn’t meeting his or her obligations, it has the potential to both delay the project and damage team morale. Follow these steps when addressing this concern:

• **Observe and document.** Whether you notice that the employee is behind schedule or teammates bring concerns to your attention, it’s important to take action. Start by observing the employee’s behavior and output and documenting your findings.

• **Consult with Human Resources.** Ask HR about relevant policies and request guidance on addressing the concern. The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service is also available to provide assistance.

• **Schedule a private meeting with the employee.** Outline your concerns and review your documentation related to late work, behavior in meetings, or other areas in need of improvement. Clarify the goals of the project and the employee’s role. Suggested language: “When you’re behind schedule, it’s harder for the team to meet its goals.”

• **Listen to the employee’s response.** Give the employee time to explain her or his side of the situation. In some instances, the concern may be resolved by a change in workflow, additional resources, or more frequent communication and follow-up between team members.

• **Establish performance expectations.** Clearly explain what you would like to see moving forward. For example: “I would like to see an improvement in your work output and communication with co-workers.”

• **Make a referral to LifeMatters®.** At this point, you may want to make a performance referral to LifeMatters or simply provide a reminder that LifeMatters can assist with personal concerns that may be impacting performance. Suggested language: “If there are personal issues that are affecting your work performance, LifeMatters is available to provide free and confidential assistance. I strongly recommend that you call. LifeMatters is available 24/7.”

• **Monitor progress.** Schedule a follow up meeting to review the employee’s progress and address any areas in need of continued improvement. If the individual’s performance still does not meet expectations, consult with HR before taking any disciplinary action.

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• **Avoid project “drift.”** During the project development phase, it’s not unusual for team members to come up with good ideas that are outside the scope of the original plan. While it’s important to be open to possibilities, be wary of letting the project drift too far from its original intent. File these ideas away for a possible “phase two” at a later date.

• **Lead through example.** Whether you are working with your usual team or people on special assignment, fostering a sense of camaraderie will result in better teamwork. Celebrate important milestones on the way to achieving your ultimate goal. Bring snacks to meetings or schedule an occasional team luncheon. Monitor your team’s stress levels, especially under tight deadlines, and do what you can to help remove obstacles that could get in the way of completing important tasks. Remember, you set the tone for how your team will behave.

• **Don’t be afraid of criticism.** Whether your project is top secret or an open book, at some point stakeholders and other staff members will likely be afforded the opportunity to comment on your progress. If you get a negative review, keep your team focused on the information that is being conveyed, not their emotional reactions. Negative feedback may provide useful information that will allow your team to troubleshoot the project and make needed changes.

While engaging in a project outside your team’s normal workflow may be a great change of pace, it can also take time away from day-to-day tasks. Figuring out how to balance all of your responsibilities may be a stretch, both personally and professionally. **LifeMatters®** by Empathia provides 24/7 assistance with addressing both personal and management concerns. Call anytime.

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**continued from inside**

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