

Warning Signs Your Sponsor Doesn't Care About the Project—and How to Change That

We all know that critical to any project's success is having a good project manager but after that it is pretty important to have a good project sponsor, in fact it can be argued that the project sponsor is the more critical role; but, like the saying goes, 'you can pick your friends but you can't pick your relatives' and the same is true of project sponsors.

There are many 'types' of project sponsor and some are really good at what they do but most can, at best, be described as the 'accidental project sponsor' – never having been trained, supported, or advised as to what is expected of them.

In 'Strategies for Project Sponsorship' the authors offer advice on many types of sponsor with suggestions for ways to work with them, or compensate for their 'skills' or 'interest' gaps. They also speak of the concept of a 'balanced sponsor' - being *involved* in the project, being *objective* about the project, being *supportive* of the project, and being *reactive* to project needs.

If your sponsor offers none of these key attributes and remains distant from the project, disengaged and/or disinterested, then first you need to find out the root cause:

Do they not know how to act as a project sponsor? Or do they not believe in the project and don't want to be associated with it in any way?

Test the reality with a one-on-one with the sponsor. If they are willing to give you time for such a meeting then it may be more a case of the former in which case:

- Speak honestly about the issues that you are facing and the challenges your project is dealing with as a consequence of their lack of involvement.
- Discuss what is expected of project sponsors and what the business also expects.

If it is the second reason then go back to the business case and explore the original thinking:

- Did they have concerns at the start about the business case – and if so what were they?
- Or do they see the role of the sponsor as a nuisance that is an added burden to an already busy schedule?

Based on this understanding you can plan a means to re-engage the sponsor if possible, and if not you need to plan to 'fill the gap' through your own efforts and any additional executive support you can obtain.

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It has been said that 'A project is one small step for the project sponsor, one giant leap for the project manager' - but wouldn't we all be that much happier if that 'giant leap' was supported by a really focused and competent project sponsor?

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More information can be found at www.thelazyprojectmanager.com

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