Use a Communication Plan to Ignore the Right People

Question:

Sam,

My project is large and has a number of stakeholders. To be honest I don't have time to communicate with all of them. It is hard enough to get all my own work done on time. It seems the more I communicate with others, the more questions they have and the more work is generated for me. There must be a better way.

Stiny

Answer:

Stinky,

Since my projects are complicated I have this same problem. And you are correct - it seems the more you communicate the more questions people ask, which leads to more communication. Before you know it that is all you are doing.

I don't know about you but my company hired me to be a project manager - not a radio talk show host. I don't have time to communicate all day.

The answer is simple - a Communication Plan. This plan helps you to determine who to ignore so you can spend your time more wisely. Let me school you in this unique concept.

- **Identify stakeholder.** You don't know who to ignore if you don't know who the stakeholders are.

- **Identify their role.** Each stakeholder has some reason they want to stick their nose into your business. Place them into categories.

    o Some people are curious.

    o Some are just nosey.

    o Some don't have enough work to do so they try to leach onto your project.

    o Some want to be a big-shot.

    o Some are trying to steal some of your budget.

- **Identify your communication strategy for each stakeholder**

    o **Ignore.** Determine who to ignore all together. Some people have little organization power. You can safely ignore them. Don't return their emails or phone calls. After a while hopefully they will give up and find some other projects to bother.

    o **Minimize.** Determine who should receive a minimum amount of information - just enough to keep them quiet and make them feel important. Answer their emails with "yes" or "okay" or "sounds good".

    o **Just enough.** These people need to get enough information about your project to keep them happy - but no more. Send financial information to the finance department. Send contract information to procurement. Send a

status update to your manager and sponsor. But don't send more then they need. As you rightly pointed out, too much information just leads to more questions.

- o **Everyone else.** If anyone else needs information on your project they can just ask you. Then you are able to determine if you want to provide none, minimal or just enough information to them.

Stinky, as you know I have been sooper-dooper project manager for many years. I did not get so strong by spending all day communicating. You should follow my advice and maybe one day you will work on a large asbestos project like me.