Get the Truth!

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All tasks are being completed when planned and within budget. There are no issues, risks have all been mitigated, and the project team members love each other and work perfectly together. How would you like to give that status for your projects every week? If you did, would anyone believe it?

Real projects don't go perfectly most of the time. They have a few warts and sometimes are downright ugly. Our job as Project Managers is to report the truth, whatever that is, to the world. Getting that truth from the project team is sometimes difficult though. What follows are some tips that will help you get to that truth.

1. **Don't shoot the messenger** – During the Operation Desert Storm (the first Gulf War), there were stories being reported by the media that Saddam Hussein would shoot his Generals if they didn't perform well. As a result he was often not told the truth about what was really going on. This caused him to make a lot of bad decisions. Verbally attacking project team members that do not tell us what we want to hear has the same effect on our projects. If you have a customer, project sponsor, or boss that is like that you may be tempted to be less than candid in your status reporting. Don't go over to the dark side!

2. **Document issues** – When a task does not go as planned it should be documented as an issue in an issues log. The task could be late or over budget for a lot of different reasons. It is important to document these in an objective way that identifies the problem and what is being done about it; but does not blame team members.   This issues log should be public to build or maintain a culture of transparency.

3. **Probe estimates** – The estimates of time or cost that seem too good to be true probably are. People are often very optimistic and do not account for risks when giving estimates. Making mistakes and having to do rework is a daily reality in the workplace that is not always taken into account. Reminding resources about this and asking them for more detail about the task being estimated and what they need to do it usually yields more realistic estimates.

4. **Ask for clarification until you get it** – Sometimes people create confusion deliberately to hide their own failures. This can be done with technical gibberish or just disorganized rambling. When someone you are collecting status from does this, take the time to organize what they are saying and ask them to explain until you have enough information. This requires some patience, but stick with it until you know the truth. There is probably something there that you need to know