

What You've Always Known About Project Management . . . but Been Afraid to Task

by Bill Sims
Walt Disney Imagineering

Bill Sims, a Disney project manager in charge of "creating the world's best theme parks on time and on budget, and having fun doing it," described the construction of the EuroDisney theme park in France. The \$1.8 billion project on 5,000 acres with seven hotels opened on time and under budget the previous April.

As a preface to his main remarks, Sims spoke on the vital importance of leadership. "Success or failure comes down to having the right people," he said. "Your job is to tell them exactly what to do and give them the authority and tools to do it." He added that leaders also need "passion," which is sometimes known as motivation.

Sims flashed nearly 50 viewgraphs to illustrate his main points of planning, organizing, coordinating, directing and controlling the project. A project life cycle guidebook will lead to mediocrity, he said, recommending a detailed custom plan instead. "Don't worship process," he said. Instead of following an elaborate organization chart, Sims recommends collaboration plus deliberate tension between functional groups and operational groups for checks and balance. His synonym for coordinating is "courtesy," directing means doing, and a better word for controlling is

"prediction" so as not to look back on a project. "No risks, no glory," he reminded the conference attendees, suggesting that schedule is also a control document.

In an ample question and answer period, Sims offered attendees a rare glimpse inside a rather private organization. He said Walt Disney Imagineering entered the computer age only three years earlier. "We are pretty conventional," he said, "not leading edge." The organization also seems to hold on to some rather old fashioned values such as honesty and fairness. In building EuroDisney, for example, the organization refused to buy into "the kickback culture" but attracted decent European contractors who knew the American group was fair. The organization is also reminiscent of an older, collegial, collaborative management climate in which everyone is on a first-name basis. Finally, Walt Disney Imagineering writes a new vision (mission) statement each year. This year it contains words like "passion" and integrity.

The former Air Force official, who has been with Disney for four years, says he is "basically a cheerleader." He will push, challenge, enable and assist his project team, getting obstacles and blockades out of their way. "It's amazing what you can do if you don't care who gets the credit," he concluded.