

Ben's Quote Note for the PM



Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.

Ben Franklin

I love quotes, and Benjamin Franklin is a source of many great ones, such as the one above.

But how is this quote relevant to Project Management? Let's break it down.

Tell me and I forget.

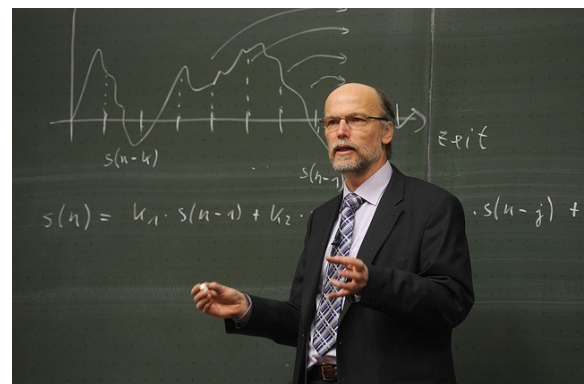
From business and personal experience, I have been the teller whose instructions were forgotten and the listener who couldn't remember verbal instructions. I know I am in good company, since voice recorders, memo apps, notepads, sticky notes, memo boards, notebooks, and more memory aids are sold every day.

So, Project Managers, Team Leaders, and Team members, don't be surprised or too disgruntled if your verbal instructions are not followed correctly or are forgotten. If you rush through directions and requirements, follow up with written instructions, or slow down to allow time for note-taking. Even better, follow Ben Franklin's advice.

Teach me, and I remember.

What someone cared enough to take the time to teach you stays with you, often whether you like it or not.

Instruction takes effort, time, and patience. Allow enough time, interaction, repetition, and tools to help the message, technique, process, or tasks stick. Encourage team members to ask questions. Ensure they feel safe coming to you for clarification or help if they are unsure what you expect of them.



Involve me and I learn

In my opinion, society has lost something precious in moving away from apprenticeships as a means of training and education. With the ever-increasing costs of college and university education, it seems there is a subtle shift back in that direction. Some fields, such as construction and manufacturing, have apprenticeships. Others offer internships that still require academic studies but incorporate hands-on training and experience with a company.



I'm a baby-boomer and a bit old school. I'm of a certain age when telling stories of past experiences becomes the natural way of things. I think it happens to everyone sooner or later after midlife.

Out in rural Missouri, we didn't have convenient access to public swimming pools. We didn't have the luxury of taking swim lessons or joining a swim team. We made do with creeks, swimming holes, quarries, ponds, lakes, and rivers.

My dad worked and did odd jobs, so he didn't have much time to take us kids places. But one Saturday, he took my mom, brother, and me to the closest state park, where there was a lovely, clean lake with sandy beaches. Being the practical dad he was, he decided it was the perfect time to teach my brother and me to swim.

Dad made us watch him swim. He explained what he did, then took us, one at a time, out deep enough into the water where we couldn't touch the bottom. With his arms supporting us, Dad told us to do as he had shown us, coaching us until we did the strokes correctly. Slowly, Dad removed his arms a few inches below us to see if we were swimming on our own. Then, he picked us up and tossed us out into deeper water (not so far that he could not quickly rescue us). "Sink or swim," he told us. Let me tell you, we learned to swim in one day. Not so pretty as to win the gold medal in the Olympics or put on a lovely water ballet, but we could swim well enough to have fun and be safe. We trusted our daddy would not let us drown and understood he was teaching us a healthy respect for the power of the water.

The takeaway of the story is to give your student or team members enough information to understand what you need them to do and then let them do it. It might not be pretty at first, but with a bit of coaching, they'll get it. Involvement means the risk of failure. Sometimes, failure is the best teacher.

<https://youtu.be/kT2KROiSXDg> John Wayne—Swim Instructor

Leaders should take a chance. If you see potential in someone, don't let a lack of experience or "formal" education stop you from tapping that potential. You might have to start in shallow water first. Support them a bit more as you help them understand what you expect, then send them out to experience the new job or task on their own. Just be ready to jump in and help if they need rescuing. You have to maintain their trust in you. If you read them correctly, they'll get it.

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