

Know your sponsor

A Tregaskis Brown LinkedIn Series



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Are you maximising the value of your relationship with your Project Sponsor?

The Sponsor (or the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO)) is ultimately accountable for the success of the project. They rely on the Project Manager to successfully deliver the project; but the Project Manager also has much to gain from the Sponsor.

This is the second in Tregaskis Brown's 4-part series 'Nailing the Project Management must-do's'. In this issue, we'll explore the benefits of gaining the Sponsor's confidence and what you can do to bolster this mutually beneficial relationship.

Benefits of gaining the confidence of the Sponsor include:

- The project is more likely to get the support it needs - The Sponsor is the project's most senior and influential role - they have access to the levers that drive change in favor of the project's success. The more support they get from you, the better champion they can be.

- Scrutiny adds value rather than pain - Scrutiny should be expected, but it's not always the helpful kind. Having the Sponsor's confidence is key to channeling their focus on aspects of the project that will benefit most from their attention.
- Decisions get made in a timely manner - A Sponsor who trusts the Project Manager will be comfortable having open and honest conversations, increasing their availability and attention to you when you need it most.

Without the Sponsor's confidence, you'll likely experience...

A lack of confidence is often shown through acts of micromanagement or mistrust. Behaviours that your Sponsor may exhibit if your relationship could be strengthened may include:

- Frequent second-guessing of day-to-day decisions
- Instructing the project team personally
- Testing evidence and information to extreme levels of detail
- Painful scrutiny that adds no value
- Slow decision making
- Regularly requesting rework
- Difficulty with honest conversations



What you can do

Trust must be earned and the benefits of gaining the Sponsor's confidence won't happen overnight. The following describes a few tactics you can adopt to begin building your Sponsor's trust:

Provide clear and informed information

Reporting on the project's progress and performance is essential for the Sponsor – so do it effectively. Providing the Sponsor with clear and accurate information on progress to date, overall performance and decisions or advice you need will make their life easier and build their confidence in your ability to lead the project to success.

Having supported many Sponsors, Tregaskis Brown's advice is to keep reporting succinct, and to the point. A backward view of the project provides only limited value. Sponsors prefer to spend more time on the forecast – looking forward is where they are able to make decisions or actions to improve an outcome.

It's also useful to describe issues using the three whats:

- what - what happened?
- so what - what's the impact of this?
- now what – what is the plan?

Know your Sponsor

Understanding the perspective, expectations and working style of the Sponsor is crucial to gaining their confidence. Take the time to find out:

- How they would like to be engaged in the project
- How they like to receive information
- The concerns they have about the project's success
- Their other responsibilities and priorities

Utilise your understanding to tailor your engagement and determine how you will optimise your interactions.

Take a no surprises approach

A good Sponsor wants to be informed of the progress of the project, but also what's hindering progress and threatening the likelihood of success. The earlier they're made aware of issues and risks, the earlier they can help. Sponsors don't like surprises.

Raising issues and risks that the Project Manager can't solve alone is only half the task. You should never discuss a problem without a viable solution. Presenting a solution, even if it's flawed, will assure the Sponsor that you have a problem-solving attitude, and the project is in capable hands.

Keep an eye out for the upcoming posts in the series that explore harnessing the power of effective project reporting and writing papers that enable good decision making.

Tregaskis Brown has almost two decades of experience supporting Sponsors and Project Managers to plan and deliver successful projects. For more governance or programme/project management advice, contact us to start a conversation.



About the Author

Sanne joined Tregaskis Brown as a graduate consultant in June 2021, after completing a Bachelor of Commerce in Marketing Management, and a Bachelor of Arts in Media, Film and Communication.

"I've found that the best way of gaining people's support is to give them the confidence that you've got everything covered and you'll raise concerns that they have a stake in"