



1Credit - Google Images

Remember That TV Show

Do you remember the show "**Breaking Bad**" that aired between 2008 – 2013?

The show begins with a high school Chemistry teacher who sells Meth to make ends meet.

What could drive a person to do what seems unthinkable?

The answer is in the title: **Break and Bad**

Most People Don't Want to Break

Most humans break under intense project performance tempos, constant changes, and work/life stressors.

It's like watching a sprinter pull a hamstring; it's painful to witness and even more when it's you!

If you watch track and field, runners sometimes pull a hamstring, grimace, and limp off the track.

Similarly, hamstrung resources get injured, limp, and stop running altogether.

Or worse, they may even run in the wrong direction to escape their pain.

9.9% of Every Dollar is Wasted Due to Poor Performance or Approximately \$2 Trillion Annually. (teamstage.io)

Most People Don't Want to Perform Badly

Listen, no one wants to do a lousy job.

But you'll do just about anything to get out of the pain or fear of:

- Being branded uncooperative/unproductive
- Job loss
- Losing bonus potential
- Pay cut/demotion/marginalized
- Feeling hopeless, exhausted, or both
- Feeling helpless to move the client/self forward
- Not having enough resources
- Not being seen, heard, valued, trusted, or understood

The above list will make any sane person break bad, to stay in play.

So, it's the Project Manager's job to triage, coach, and re-engage resources for project success.

Whether the organization's performance culture supports managing project resources effectively, the client needs Project Managers to step up and ensure resources show up, play strong, and serve the client's highest needs.

Three Things a PM Can Do When Resources Break Bad

1. **Create a Just Culture and Accurately Triage Resource's Under-performance**
2. **Document Performance Improvement Agreement and The Way Forward**
3. **Coach Resources for Improved Work Performance**

Here's how Project Managers can excel with resources after they have broken bad.

STEP #1 – Just Culture Triage

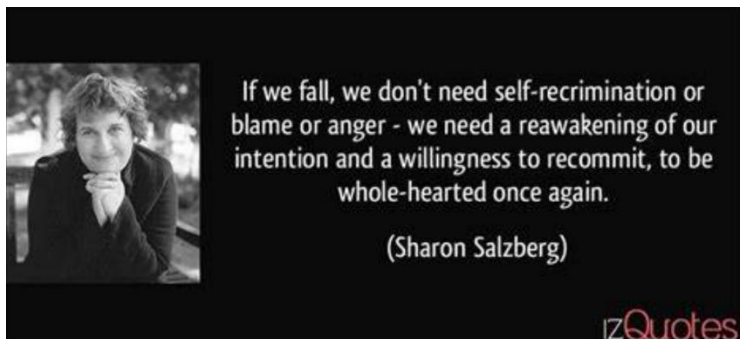
Have you ever been blamed for something you did not do or wasn't entirely your fault?

During swift-moving project phases, it is easy to jump to conclusions about people's intentions, behaviors, and impacts.

The Healthcare and Aviation industries previously had epic track records of shooting from the hip and blaming people when things went wrong. Ultimately, losing enough lives and crashing enough planes, the public and government outcry for better results compelled these industries to focus on attacking root causes instead of blaming people for poor outcomes.

For projects, we must also find effective practices for making better split-second decisions, performing root cause analysis, eliminating recurrent work/worker issues, and driving client results.

How often have people been blamed for adverse business outcomes when culture, business models, leadership, or other factors were the root cause? Too often – Read On.



Enter Just Culture

Let's talk about [Just Culture](#) and how it will improve the Project Manager and resource experience of work.

Healthcare and Aviation achieved terrific results by embracing a Just Culture. The Just Culture difference from the previous culture eliminated the fear of making mistakes, focused on problem prevention, required root cause analysis, and promoted greater trust, transparency, and proper accountability when things went wrong.

According to Outcome Engenuity, [Just Culture](#) organizations adopt a human-centered solution to system design, justice, and culture that learns when things don't go right and how to ensure they don't go wrong again.

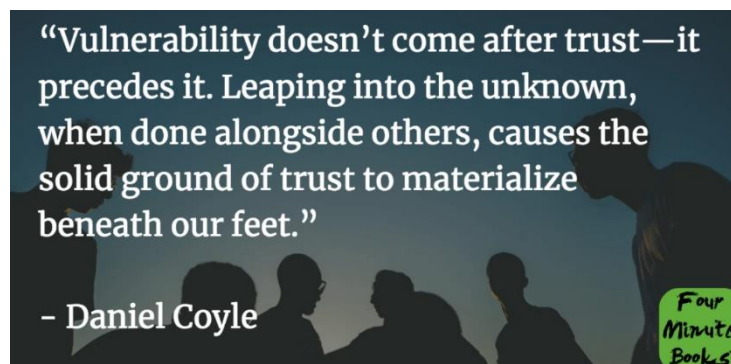
How does this relate to Project Managers managing resources that have broken bad?

Well, the first step is ascertaining what ACTUALLY and FACTUALLY contributed to resource under-performance using root cause analysis:

- a) **Organizational Level:** Is the underperformance driven partially or entirely by the organizational structure, systems, culture, or other factors?
- b) **Leadership Level:** Is the underperformance driven partially or entirely by leadership's inability to manage performance?
- c) **Team Level:** Is the underperformance driven partially or entirely by the trickle-down of broken systems/processes, or does the lack thereof impact the department's or team's ability to perform?
- d) **Individual Level:** Is the underperformance driven partially or entirely by the individual:
 - a. **Error** in judgment or an honest mistake
 - b. **At-Risk Behavior** is choosing to Behavior in a way that increases risk and adverse results or mistaken belief that their actions are justified
 - c. **Reckless Behavior** – Choosing to disregard a substantial and unjustifiable risk consciously.
 - d. **Lacking or low [competency or skill](#)** (not part of Just Culture)

As Project Managers, we are responsible for finding the risks, issues, and preventative measures for resources breaking bad instead of guessing or blaming people when things go wrong.

And a Just Culture is the opposite of a "Blame Culture." Just culture makes it safe to be vulnerable, so trust emerges between Project Managers and their resources, which is foundational to running a highly successful project.



STEP #2 – Document for Agreement and Performance Management

Use The Organization's Performance Management Process, Tools, and Systems

Sometimes, the resource does not report to you, but you must manage them.

The documentation you create can be shared with the resource's first-line manager, who can either meet with you and the resource together or take the lead and conduct the performance expectation and goal-setting conversation (circle back with the manager later if you are not in the performance meeting).

At a minimum, here's what a Project Manager must know and do to engage their resource's under-performance with the goal of improved performance by their resource:

Steps 5 & 6	Project Manager Know-How	Project Manager Talk Track with Resource
<p>STEP 5: Unblock and Unlock Potential with a Coaching Discussion</p>	<p>Most resources have good reasons for not moving forward, such as real or perceived issues. Issues must be addressed with the resource leading the discussion in a safe, non-threatening environment.</p> <p>Ask your resource to share any potential barriers to improved performance. Note the ideas you both generate to clear a path for individual, team, and organizational success.</p> <p>Lastly, consider existing and related SMART goals impacting the coaching discussion and how those goals might be changed moving forward.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What barriers must you overcome to succeed in your role? • How can I help you overcome these barriers? • If this is an enormous task, have you considered breaking your task down into smaller tasks and steps? • What would be the first step toward your desired solution or outcome? What would come next? • What could throw you off track? • What would help you stay on track? • Is there anything else we should consider before crafting your way forward as improved performance?
<p>STEP 6: Recap and Follow Up On Agreed Upon Next Steps, Metrics, and Results</p>	<p>Buy-in is everything, so recap coaching key points and after-actions. Identify any barriers between the resource and planned outcomes.</p> <p>Focus on your resource's organizational goals, double-check any tools needed, trust your resource, and they will accomplish the exceptional.</p> <p>Collaboratively adjust any impacted SMART goals, and write/enter those goals into the resource's performance record.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let me repeat what I hear you saying about what led to your under-performance. • Did I capture your thoughts? If not, what did I miss? • Can you help me craft a SMART goal to address the discussed issue? • Are you clear on my role in completing your tasks or developing solutions? • Let's review expectations, achievable goals, and critical metrics for your SMART goal progress. • Let's write out the final goal(s). • I believe you will complete this task. • Do not hesitate to ask for my help.

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Finally, when addressing resource issues, Project Managers must use company-authorized forms or performance management systems to document the way forward in managing the issue experienced by the resource.

If the resource is not a direct report, the Project Managers must follow up with the resource's leader to ensure alignment on what all parties are doing toward managing, measuring, and reporting the progress/results of the resource.

STEP #3 - Coach for Improved Work Performance

In a nutshell, the Project Manager and resources are on the clock for performance, which means you don't have forever to complete the project or resolve performance issues on the fly.

So, documented performance must take on a fast-moving, iterative performance development and management trajectory consistent with getting things done as soon as possible (resource development and project results).

Enter Ferdinand Fournies.

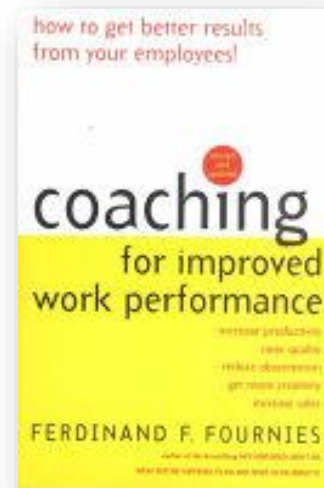
Development and performance must consider a realistic improvement trajectory that includes Ferdinand's concept of "Lesser Degrees of Failure."

[Ferdinand Fournies's book](#), "Lesser Degrees of Failure," makes a great point about incremental but fast-moving development activities.

Most resources can't manage a heavy project workload and heavy professional development.

So, you can't have resources overtasked with trying to pivot in their performance.

You must be strategic and plan incremental job competency and skill improvements, resulting in improved performance over a finite period.



Failure Isn't Fatal

Like setting project milestones, you set iterative performance improvement milestones indicative of applied learning producing desired project results.

For example, if your resource needs to log risks and issues consistently. You would set a goal of 100% if the resource knew what to do and could readily update the risks and issues log.

Nor Is Failure Sustainable

However, if the resource doesn't know how to log items, you must collaboratively plan resource development, provide meaningful two-way feedback, and create developmental checkpoints as near-term development milestones:

Degrees	Milestones	Outcomes	Performance Checkpoints
Failing	Milestone# 1	Under-performing and agreed-upon way forward is set in writing.	End of Week 1
Less Failure	Milestone# 2	Learned how to log items.	End of Week 2
Performing	Milestone# 3	Logs items with Project Manager feedback.	End of Week 3
Success	Milestone# 4	Logs items conform to the quality, consistency, and timeliness of logging items.	End of Week 4

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Again, resource development progress has deadlines to ensure incremental, tangible results.

Remember, resources don't have forever to pivot before re-aligned elsewhere or removed from the project.

Previously, we discussed SMART goals.

A SMART goal for this resource would include an incremental performance improvement with each successive milestone. If milestones or the SMART goal go unattained, then it is imperative you directly involve the resource's manager and discuss the possibility of issuing corrective action to motivate performance by the resource.

Conclusion

Remember, project management isn't for everyone, no matter how well you do the work. The work must be fulfilling, tie into your big "Why," and help you thrive, not just survive!

After noodling your big "Why" and choosing a project management career desired state or path, begin leveraging the [Career "Triple Constraints" concept](#) to develop your unique journey and decidedly fulfilling career path.

Call to Action

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