

## How to Win a Fight with Project Executives

*Written by Andrew Miller*

Now, when I say fight, of course I do not mean an all out Battle Royal cage match with your Project Executive (PE). I mean, when you come to a point in the project and you and the PE disagree, fundamentally (on a particular vendor, let's say). Let's assume, for the purpose of this article, that you have already sat down and discussed the issue on reasonable terms and you still both sit on opposite sides of the issue...what do you do? As the Project Manager (PM), you are responsible for ensuring the success of the project. As the PE, your colleague will be accountable for the success of the project. You both have a lot at stake, so some discussions can get quite heated. There are a few things you can do to resolve this:

### **Try to determine the PE's motivation for their decision.**

Are they motivated purely by the success of the project, or are there other areas that may be influencing them? Their boss? Office politics? Desire to be recognized? Once you have determined this, it may make compromise a little easier.

### **Acknowledge their position, but also identify its risks.**

You can always say things like "I realize that choosing the smaller vendor will be less expensive in the short-term, but my experience has shown that you may end up doubling your costs later when we realize the vendor's short-comings. It is not right or wrong, only a legitimate risk." By identifying the risks, you are separating the idea from the person and judging purely based on the merits of the idea, not who came up with it.

### **Know when to concede and put it behind you.**

After going through all of the right steps and your PE is still standing firm on their position, you also need to know when to let it go. The PE has ultimate accountability, so at some point you need to move forward. This is not easy or fun, but is sometimes in the best interest of the project. This is not "giving in," it is just being smart. You are not going to win every battle. Put it behind you and move on.

There is no right answer to this situation, but you should only be doing what you are comfortable with. I have previously told clients that I disagree with their opinion, but I will go along with it because they are the client and have the final say. I agree to move forward reticently, but I also make clear that the risks have been identified and that I will not be held accountable if the decision turns out to be the wrong one! However, it is also important that if the decision turns out to be the right one, give your PE some credit.

---

**Andrew Miller** is President of ACM Consulting Inc. ([www.acmconsulting.ca](http://www.acmconsulting.ca)), a company that provides supply chain and project management solutions. Andrew is PMP certified and has led a variety of clients through complex systems implementations and organizational changes. He is an Instructor of the Procurement and Contracting course, part of the Masters Certificate in Project Management program through the Schulich School of Business Executive Education Centre (SEEC) in Toronto. Andrew has an International MBA from the Schulich School of Business with majors in Logistics and Marketing. He can be reached at [andrew@acmconsulting.ca](mailto:andrew@acmconsulting.ca).