

The 45-Minute Team Project

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I was teaching seniors, who would graduate in one month, professional skills as part of a design class. We had a class debate on job ethics, and most of the students were just dead. Next week I was scheduled to present the last lecture of the semester on time management, effectiveness, and efficiency. I dreaded trying to lecture to or create a discussion with these zombies.

Once I realized that I could give them a time management team project, it was easy to develop an assignment to complete in 45 minutes, which gave me five minutes at the end of class for reflection.

TIME MANAGEMENT ASSIGNMENT

Your company has hired a number of engineers from different colleges. They all start training on Monday. Your boss realizes that no one has looked at how to present time management and efficiency to the new hires, but the company knows from experience that new engineers need this training. To cover this oversight, your boss decides to give the new engineers a book on time management and efficiency.

Write a report recommending the best book on time management and efficiency for new engineers. Give reasons for your choice and compare to at least four other books. The report's first sentence should clearly state what book is recommended. The report should include 500 to 1,000 words, a reference list, and the names of contributors. Email the team report in 45 minutes to the professor and report back to the classroom.

THE RESULTS

After some initial grumbling and complaints, the four teams became energized and started to work on their laptops. They mainly used Amazon and Google to find books; however,

finding books was the easy part. The groups used customer reviews and the “look inside” feature in Amazon to compare the books and determine the best. As expected the reports were clearly first drafts, but they were all turned in on time. Although there was considerable overlap in the books they found, each group recommended a different book. The four books recommended were:

B. Tracy, *Eat That Frog! 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time*, 2nd ed., Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., San Francisco (2007).

S. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Simon & Schuster, New York (1984).

D. Allen, *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*, Penguin Books, New York (2002).

R. Helmer, *Time Management for Engineers and Constructors*, 2nd ed., ASCE Press, Baltimore (1998).

In the last five minutes, I noted that this type of assignment—determining a recommendation quickly with incomplete information—is fairly common in industry.

Although the exercise was novel, teamwork was not because the students had worked in their teams all semester. When asked if they preferred this type of team exercise or a lecture, there was general agreement they preferred the team exercise. They will remember this exercise because they worked much harder in class than I did. Similar projects but with a different deliverable such as presenting a short original play could easily be developed for other professional skills. □

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This one-page column presents practical teaching, advising, and diversity tips in sufficient detail that others can adopt the tip. Focus on the teaching method, not content. The column should be maximum 550 words, but subtract 50 words for each figure or table. Submit as a Word file to Phil Wankat <wankat@ecn.purdue.edu>.