

UBC PMP Assignment - Interview Request
Rick Mann asks and Max Wideman responds
Copyright is to the respective authors
Published here October 2020

Introduction

This is a record of an interesting and valuable exchange of emails in which Rick Mann asks some serious questions about project management and Max attempts a serious opinion. Rick Mann, by the way, is Director, Development & Construction so he is already well informed about project management. But first, let us show how it all came about.

On 1 Jun 2020, at 19:59, Rick Mann <rick.mann@iompropertygroup.com> wrote:

Hello Mr. Wideman,

My name is Rick and I've recently enrolled in the PMP Certification Course offered by the Sauder School for Business at UBC. I read that you were instrumental in guiding the core competencies of the course as well as the PMI. We are nearing the end of the course and one of the capstone assignments is to interview a Project Manager Professional. I was hoping that if you are available, you would do me the honor of responding yourself. I figured if I'm going to interview someone, I might as well start with the man that started it all.

I would really relish the opportunity to pick your brain on what it takes to succeed as a Project Manager as well as hear about some of your experiences in the field – please let me know if you're available later this week. We can work with whichever mode of communication suits you: telephone, email, videoconference, etc. I wouldn't take more than 20-25 minutes of your time and would be very grateful for the opportunity.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

Rick Mann
Director, Development & Construction

To which Max responded:

Hello Rick,

Thank you for your Email and telephone call.

I would be happy to try to answer your questions. However, I much prefer for you to set your questions down in an email, so I can give some careful thought to the answers. Not only that, but you will have to give careful thought on how you ask the questions and you will have a written record of the answers – saves you writing down what you think I said!

Some of my answers may simply be references to texts on my web site. I believe in saving words.

Good luck with the rest of the course – I would love to know some of the things that it is teaching you – not because I want to plagiarize but because I would like to be sure that their content is sound.

Cheers,

R. Max Wideman

Rick Replied:

Wonderful! Thank you kindly for taking the time. I will prepare some questions and email them over later this week.

I really appreciate your taking the time out of your schedule for this interview.

Sent from my Bell Samsung device over Canada's largest network.

Later, On 2 Jun 2020, at 20:31, Rick Mann wrote:

Hello again, Mr. Wideman.

Once more, thank you for taking the time to conduct this e-interview. I can only image the value of your time and I really appreciate you sparing some for me.

I've had a chance to visit your website and I've bookmarked it for future reference. There is an entire anthology of PM musings, articles, tips and wisdoms that would take me years to digest properly. Based on some of what I had time to read, and some other of my own curiosity, I've prepared the following list of questions.

Please feel free to go into as much or little detail as you feel comfortable:

Here, Rick posed five significant questions that are repeated in the subsequent Q & A to follow. At the time I was particularly busy so there was something of a delay here. However, subsequently, Rick was good enough to record the following in his next email:

Mr. Wideman,

Thank you again for taking the time for my interview. I am truly humbled and inspired. Below is the final version of the interview if you care to look it over. I took excerpts out of the articles you referenced for context on my assignment.

I sincerely wanted to thank you again for your time. It truly means a lot to me:

Below you will see my interview with R. Max Wideman, P.Eng. Mr. Wideman has over 50 years of Project Management experience and has accumulated much of his learnings and experiences on his website (maxwideman.com).

Mr. Wideman is widely known for his contributions to the PM industry, especially when in the 1980's he led a team of 80 PMI volunteers to create the PMBOK and was published in 1987. Mr. Wideman has an extensive list of awards and achievements throughout his illustrious career including being awarded the Person of the Year by the PMI in 1986 as well as being recognized for Distinguished Contribution by the PMI in 1985.

I'm not going to lie, I was nervous reaching out to him and am humbled that he accepted my interview request.

Rick's questions and Max's answers Part 1

Question 1 - The biggest project of all

Rick Mann: I had an opportunity to look over your article on "the biggest project of all (that never got started)". You had an interesting anecdote about an experience with your grandfather and how the worms turned to cannibalism given the finite space and resources. The allusion speaks to our current situation as a human race and our over-

population. What is the biggest project that never got started? What is the solution? What is the project?

[Here Mr. Wideman refers me to his article:

http://www.maxwideman.com/musings/biggest_project.htm]

Max Wideman: The real problem that underscores the situations ... such as loss of wild life habitat, desertification, soil and ground water loss, chemical contamination, failure of fish stocks, over-crowding in cities, traffic congestion, and on and on is so obvious as to be hardly worthy of mention. Indeed, warnings by project management seminar keynote speakers and forum attempts to generate interest in such projects in the period 1990 to 1993 have been quietly buried. Why? Because any discussion of the root cause is so politically incorrect.

What is the root cause? Do we really need to ask? Yes, it is population growth and, because of that, the very survival of mankind as we know it is at stake. If only the world could talk about it, openly and without rhetoric or prejudice, then develop a comprehensive program to tackle this problem seriously and with vigor, would be the biggest and most valuable project of all.

Q & A Part 2

Question 2 – Most potent quality of a leader

RM: There are many different qualities that make an effective leader: visionary, strong work ethic, organization, empathy, strong communications skills... the list goes on. In your experience, what would you describe as the most potent quality a leader in a PM role can exude to successfully lead projects and teams?

MW: Absolutely in my mind is the ability to communicate effectively to the PM's team, as well as to other key stakeholders. The second most important ability is to be able to listen positively. You will find lots of info on the subject if you use the search facility on my website. Just go and search for 'communication'.

In my opinion, 'Information/Communication', as it should be called, is one of the poorest developed PMBOK topics, and is probably given insufficient attention when project management is being taught.

Question 3 – Handling too many projects

RM: There's a reference in some of your musings that when a PM takes on too many projects, they all suffer. What strategies would you recommend to aspiring PM professionals on how to handle multiple projects? How would you handle situations where the Executive Management put equal importance and urgency on all projects and are perhaps unwilling to invest in more management personnel?

MW: In my view, the role of project manager, when given a project, he or she must stand up and take charge - and must make that clear to all concerned. Don't stand for any overloading whatever. Depending on the type and size of projects involved, I suggest that the maximum of three real projects is the limit. If, however, they are not real projects - and by that I mean responsibility for all of scope, quality, time, cost and risk - either refuse them outright, or delegate them to someone else.

If none of that works, then quit. Yes, quit. You will be better off somewhere else where

management has a better understanding of project management and provides the necessary support in the first place.

Q&A Part 3

Question 4 – Standing up against overload

RM: Being a PM and being a person others look to for leadership and directions, sometimes one is left with many job titles: Communications Liaison, Problem Solver, Problem Avoider, Morale Booster, Reporting Officer, etc. How could a PM balance these varying job titles and still maintain a work-life balance? What are some strategies you suggest when the workload is intimidating while family needs and social obligations also factor into a person's responsibilities?

MW: See answer to Q3. Stand up and take a stand for what you can successfully handle. Refuse overload or request some one to whom the additional work can be delegated. Anything else will lead to failure, or at least less than optimum outcomes. That is not good for your reputation, nor is it good for the organization. Always be ready to quit if you don't get reasonable satisfaction. Make it clear that a recipe for failure should not be on the table.

Question 5

RM: Imagine you had a time machine that allowed you to visit your younger self, perhaps before you ever ventured into a career in PM (for the purpose of the question imagine there would be no repercussions of this discussion other than simply having a conversation). You only have 1 hour before the machine has to take you back. What would you say to your younger self? What advice would you give him? What nuggets of wisdom would you impart?

MW: Simple. Study my Issacons. Make sure that project management is really what you want to do in life - decide whether or not you are suited to that kind of work. And read this paper: http://www.maxwideman.com/papers/pmw_rmw/advice.htm .

RM: Here is an excerpt I took out:

"So, for those in, or entertaining the idea of getting into, project management, it is very important to establish whether you are really cut out for it. By my reckoning, some 30% of the working population is not suited to project work of any kind and those people should seek careers elsewhere. For the rest, the work is exciting, satisfying, and full of opportunities."

Now note my closing quote, which is as Max said: "If you are comfortable with all of that, then go for it. As I said, the work is exciting, satisfying, and full of opportunities!"

Rick Mann
Director, Development & Construction