

MAKE IT HAPPEN!

How to Run Any Project Like a Pro

A project management adventure for ages 12-16



Follow four friends. Run one school fair. Learn the skills that
build bridges, launch apps, and land rovers on Mars.

This book in 20 seconds

A **project** is anything you build, plan, or pull off that has a start, a finish, and a goal. A birthday surprise. A science fair entry. A video game level. A school fair.

Project management is the skill of getting it done — on purpose, not by luck.

In this book, four friends — **Zara, Leo, Mei, and Dev** — decide to run a Spring Fair to raise money for their school library. You'll watch them plan it, mess it up, fix it, and pull it off. Every chapter gives you one tool they used, one thing to try yourself, and one thing to remember.

By the last page, you'll know how real project managers think — the same people who build stadiums and power plants. (A real one helped write this book. You'll hear stories from their desk.)

REMEMBER THIS

Big things aren't done by big people. They're done by regular people with a plan.

What's inside

Your map through the book. (Page numbers fill in when you open this in Word — click Update Field.)

CHAPTER 1

You Already Manage Projects

It started at the lockers on a Tuesday.

“The library can't buy new books this year,” Zara said, reading from her phone. “Budget cuts.”

“That's the worst,” said Leo, who had read every graphic novel in there twice.

Mei snapped her fingers. “So we get them the money. We throw a fair. Games, popcorn, music. Two dollars a ticket.”

Dev laughed. “You can't just **throw** a fair. That's, like... a hundred things. Booths. Prizes. Permission. Money. What if it rains?”

Everyone went quiet. Because Dev was right. It **was** a hundred things.

And that is exactly what a project is.



The moment every project starts: somebody says it out loud.

What makes something a project?

Brushing your teeth is not a project. You do it every day, the same way, forever. That kind of repeating work is called **operations** — keeping things running.

A **project** is different. It has three ingredients:

1. **A goal** — something new exists at the end that didn't exist before. (A fair! Money for books!)
2. **A start and a finish** — it's temporary. Fair day comes, and then it's over.
3. **A hundred things that have to come together** — different tasks, different people, one deadline.

You've already done projects: a group presentation, a birthday party, learning a song for a recital, building something in Minecraft with friends before the server reset. You just didn't call them projects.

So what's a project MANAGER?

When Dev said “that's a hundred things,” every one of those hundred things needed a person thinking about it. But someone also has to think about **all of them at once** — what order they go in, whether there's enough time and money, and whether the whole thing is still headed toward the goal.

That someone is the **project manager**. Not the boss of the people — the keeper of the plan. In our story, that's Zara. Not because she's the smartest or the loudest. Because she's the one who says: “Okay. Let's figure out what it takes.”

TRY IT (5 MINUTES)

Think of something you pulled off in the last year — a party, a build, a performance, anything.

Write down: What was the goal? When did it start and end?
List five things that had to happen for it to work.

Congratulations. You just described a project you managed.

REMEMBER THIS

A project = a goal + a deadline + a hundred moving pieces. A project manager keeps the pieces moving toward the goal.

CHAPTER 2

Meet the Team (and the Grown-Ups)

Wednesday lunch. Zara flipped her notebook open.

“If we’re doing this, everyone owns a piece. Leo — you’re building things, so booths and games. Mei — food and music. Dev — you’re good with money, so tickets and the budget. I’ll keep the master plan and deal with the grown-ups.”

“Deal with which grown-ups?” asked Mei.

“All of them,” Zara said grimly.

The team: who does what

A team works when **every piece of the project has exactly one owner**. Not zero owners (it gets forgotten). Not two owners (they each think the other has it). One.

Person	Owns	In pro language
Zara	The whole plan, the schedule, talking to the principal	Project manager
Leo	Games & booths	Team member / workstream lead
Mei	Food, music & fun	Team member / workstream lead
Dev	Money in, money out	Team member (budget)

The grown-ups: sponsors and stakeholders

Here’s a secret about every project on Earth: it needs a **sponsor** — the person with the power to say YES. The sponsor doesn’t do the work. They **make the work possible**: they give permission, unlock money and rooms, and back

you up when things get hard. For the fair, that's **Principal Ortiz**. No principal, no fair.

And around every project stand the **stakeholders** — everyone the project touches, whether they lift a finger or not:

- **The librarian** — the fair is *for* her books. She should love the plan.
- **Teachers** — the fair uses their schoolyard and their Friday afternoon.
- **Parents** — some will bake, some will help, all will have opinions.
- **The janitor, Mr. Coyle** — knows where the tables, extension cords, and rain plans live. The most underrated stakeholder in the building.

Stakeholders can make your project fly or sink it. The trick is simple: **find them early, ask what they care about, and keep them in the loop**. People who feel included help. People who feel surprised complain.

FROM A REAL PROJECT DESK

On big construction projects, the sponsor is often a company executive and there can be *hundreds* of stakeholders — neighbors, inspectors, even the city mayor. Real project managers keep an actual list called a **stakeholder register**: who they are, what they care about, and who talks to them. The fair's version fits on one notebook page. The habit is identical.

TRY IT (5 MINUTES)

For your own project idea, draw three circles: TEAM (who does the work), SPONSOR (who can say yes), STAKEHOLDERS (who cares or is affected).

Put at least one name in each circle. If the sponsor circle is empty — that's your first task.

REMEMBER THIS

Every task gets exactly one owner. Every project gets a sponsor. And nobody likes being surprised.

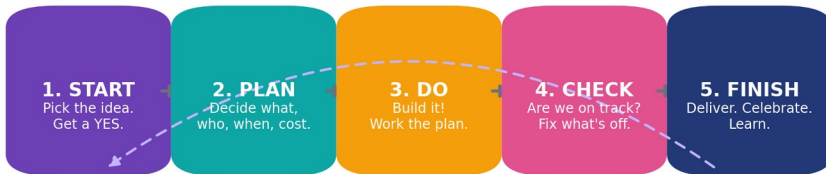
CHAPTER 3

The Life of a Project

“So where do we even start?” Leo asked. “Do we just... start building booths?”

“No,” said Zara, and drew five boxes on the whiteboard.

Every project that has ever existed — a fair, a phone, a hospital — lives through the same five stages. Pros call it the **project life cycle**. You can call it the map.



...and CHECK loops back into DO the whole time you're building

The five stages every project goes through — and the loop that never stops.

The five stages

1. **START.** Turn a fuzzy idea into a clear goal, and get the sponsor's YES. (Chapter 4.)
2. **PLAN.** Decide what's in and out, break the work into tasks, put them on a calendar, count the money, spot the risks. (Chapters 5–11. Yes, planning is most of this book. That's on purpose.)
3. **DO.** Build the booths. Order the prizes. Put up the posters. Work the plan.
4. **CHECK.** While you're doing, keep asking: are we on track? Fix what's drifting. This isn't a stage that happens *after* doing — it loops alongside it, every single week.

5. **FINISH.** Run the fair. Hand the money to the librarian. Return the popcorn machine. Say thank you. Write down what you learned. *Celebrate.*

Why bother with stages?

Because the number one way projects die is people jumping straight from *idea* to *doing*. They buy supplies before knowing the budget. They build before getting permission. Then something they never thought about — the rain, the rules, the two-week shipping time — lands on their head in week five, when it's too late to duck.

The stages force the thinking to happen **while thinking is still cheap**. Changing a plan costs an eraser. Changing a half-built fair costs your whole weekend.

FROM A REAL PROJECT DESK

Giant projects use the same five stages — they just repeat PLAN → DO → CHECK for each phase: design, then build, then test. Software teams spin through mini-cycles called **sprints**, two weeks each: plan a little, build a little, check, repeat. Same map, different speeds.

REMEMBER THIS

Idea → YES → Plan → Do (while Checking) → Finish. Skipping a stage doesn't save time. It borrows time from your future self, with interest.

CHAPTER 4

Get a YES: The One-Page Promise

Thursday, 3:15 p.m. Principal Ortiz's office.

Zara slid one page across the desk. Not a speech. Not a poster. One page:

THE SPRING FAIR — ONE-PAGE PROMISE

What: A Spring Fair in the schoolyard — 3 games, popcorn & bake sale, music.

Why: Raise at least \$100 for new library books.

When: Friday, May 22, 3–6 p.m. (Rain plan: the gym.)

Who: Zara (lead), Leo, Mei, Dev + parent helpers. Sponsor: you!

Cost: About \$255 to run it — we collect it from ticket pre-sales and a small class fund, and pay it back first from fair money.

What we need from you: Permission, the schoolyard, and Mr. Coyle's tables.

Principal Ortiz read it twice. “You thought about rain,” she said. “Approved.”

Why one page beats a big speech

That page is what professionals call a **project charter**. It's the birth certificate of a project. It answers the six questions every sponsor is silently asking: *what, why, when, who, how much — and what do you need from me?*

Notice what the page does:

- **The goal is a number.** Not “raise money” — “at least \$100 for books.” A goal you can measure is a goal you can hit. Fuzzy goals produce fuzzy projects.

- **It shows you've seen the dangers.** One line about rain told the principal more than ten minutes of enthusiasm would have.
- **It asks for something specific.** Sponsors can't help you if they don't know what “help” means.

And here's the part most people miss: once the sponsor signs, the page protects **you**. When someone later says “wait, I thought the fair was going to have a dunk tank,” you point at the page. The promise is written down. That's the whole magic of writing things down: memories argue, paper doesn't.

TRY IT (5 MINUTES)

Take your project idea and write its One-Page Promise using the six questions: What? Why (with a number)? When? Who? How much? What do I need from my sponsor? Keep it to one page. If it doesn't fit, your idea isn't clear yet — which is exactly the point of writing it.

REMEMBER THIS

No YES, no project. And a goal isn't real until it's a number on a page someone approved.

CHAPTER 5

Draw the Line: What's IN, What's OUT

Friday, the news was out, and everyone had ideas.

“You should get a dunk tank!” “My cousin's band could play!” “Fireworks!”

By Monday, the fair in people's heads was three times bigger than the fair on the page. Mei looked panicked. “Are we doing all that now?”

“No,” said Zara. “We're drawing the line.”

The Fair's scope: one line, two lists

IN ✓

- Ring-toss + 2 more games
- Popcorn & bake-sale table
- Music playlist + speakers
- Posters around school

OUT ✕

- Dunk tank (no water hookup)
- Live band (too costly)
- Food we cook ourselves (safety rules)
- Fireworks (...no.)

Scope: the most important boring word ever

Scope means: everything the project WILL deliver — and, just as loudly, what it WON'T. The IN list is your to-do universe. The OUT list is your shield.

Why write down what you're **not** doing? Because of the sneakiest force in all of project management: **scope creep**. It never arrives as one huge demand. It arrives as tiny, reasonable-sounding sentences: “While you're at it, could

you also..." "It's just one more..." Each one costs a little time and a little money. Ten of them cost your deadline.

How to say no without making enemies

The dunk tank kid isn't your enemy — he's excited. So Zara didn't say "no, dumb idea." She said the three-part sentence every project manager learns:

THE MAGIC NO

"That's a cool idea. It's not in this fair — here's why (no water hookup, and it'd eat half our budget). Let's write it down for next year's fair."

Cool idea → not in this one, because → saved for later. People don't need a yes. They need to be heard.

And if an idea is **so** good it should change the plan? Then it goes to the sponsor as a real question: "This adds \$40 and one week — do you want it enough to approve that?" Changing scope is allowed. Changing it **by accident** is how projects sink.

FROM A REAL PROJECT DESK

On real construction sites, scope creep has a price tag with lots of zeros. That's why the pros run every change through a **change request** — a mini one-page promise saying what it adds, what it costs, and who approved it. A project that says yes to everything finishes nothing.

TRY IT (5 MINUTES)

For your project, write the IN list (5–8 things max) and the OUT list (at least 3 things people will probably suggest).

Practice the Magic No out loud once. Seriously. It feels weird, then it feels powerful.

REMEMBER THIS

Scope is a line you draw on purpose. Guard it with the Magic No: cool idea → not this time, because → saved for later.

CHAPTER 6

Break It Down: From Scary to Small

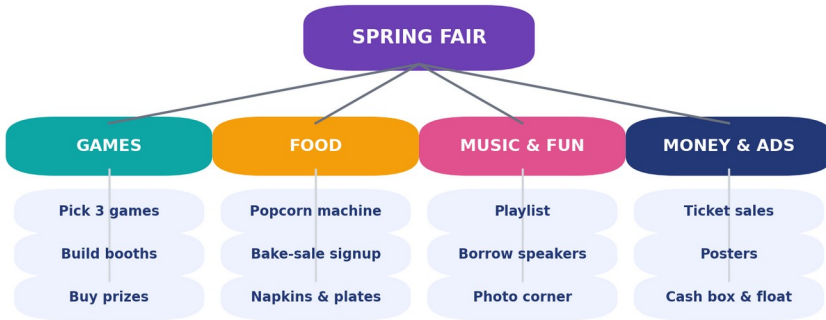
“A fair” is not a task. You can’t *do* “a fair” on a Tuesday afternoon. Big goals are like giant Lego sets: nobody builds the picture on the box. You build bag 1, then bag 2.

So the team covered a table in sticky notes and played a game Zara called **“what would that take?”** — asking it over and over until every note was something one person could actually finish.



Planning night: sticky notes, the money jar, and the wall chart.

“The fair.” *What would that take?* — Games, food, music, money. “Games.” *What would that take?* — Pick the games, build the booths, buy the prizes. “Buy the prizes.” Can Leo do that with one trip and \$90? **Yes.** Stop there. That's a task.



The fair, broken down. Pros call this a Work Breakdown Structure. You can call it the task tree.

The rules of breaking down

1. **Keep asking “what would that take?”** until each piece is small enough for one person to own and finish.
2. **Everything on the IN list must appear somewhere in the tree.** If “posters” is in scope but on nobody's branch, posters will not happen. The tree is where scope becomes work.
3. **Nothing outside the IN list gets a branch.** (Nice try, dunk tank.)
4. **Write tasks as actions:** “Build ring-toss booth,” not “Booth stuff.” If it doesn't start with a verb, you can't do it.

When they finished, the impossible hundred things turned out to be **23 sticky notes**. Twenty-three! Dev counted them twice. “That's... actually doable,” he said, and that sentence — **that's actually doable** — is the exact feeling this tool exists to create.

FROM A REAL PROJECT DESK

A real power-plant schedule can hold thousands of tasks — and it's built exactly this way: project → big chunks → work packages → tasks, each with one owner. The tool scales from 23 sticky notes to 20,000 lines. The question is always

the same: *what would that take?*

TRY IT (5 MINUTES)

Write your project name on one sticky note. Ask “what would that take?” and make a note for each answer.

Keep going until every note is one-person-one-afternoon sized. Count them. Feel the fear turn into a list.

REMEMBER THIS

You can't do a project. You can only do tasks. Break it down until 'impossible' becomes a number.

CHAPTER 7

Put It on the Calendar

Twenty-three tasks. Six weeks. Dev grabbed the calendar. “Easy — four tasks a week, done.”

“Nope,” said Leo. “You can't paint booths before we've *picked the games*. You can't set up before *everything else*. Some of these have to wait for others.”

Leo had just discovered the thing that makes scheduling interesting: **order matters**. When one task can't start until another finishes, that's called a **dependency**. Get the dependencies right and the calendar almost draws itself:

The Fair schedule — the BOLD chain is the critical path (zero wiggle room)



The chain with zero wiggle room

Look at the bold chain: **YES → pick games → order prizes → set up → FAIR DAY**. Now look at the prizes bar. It's two weeks long — not because choosing prizes is hard, but because *shipping takes two weeks*. Nothing Leo does can shrink it.

Add up the bold chain and it takes exactly six weeks. The fair is in exactly six weeks. That chain has **zero wiggle room**: if

any bold task slips even three days, fair day slips — or arrives with no prizes.

Pros call this chain the **critical path**, and finding it is the single most professional move in this book. It tells you where to focus: a one-day delay on posters? Annoying, survivable — posters have slack (pros call spare time **float**). A one-day delay ordering prizes? Emergency. Same size delay, totally different meaning — *because of where it sits.*

THE TWO SCHEDULE QUESTIONS

When someone says a task is late, don't panic. Ask:

- 1. Is it on the critical path?** If yes → act today. If no →
- 2. How much float does it have?** If the delay is smaller than the slack, breathe. Watch it. Move on.

FROM A REAL PROJECT DESK

A real project manager's team once opened their schedule and found the computer showing a scary number: **minus 161 days**. It meant a huge machine part now needed about six months longer to build than the promise allowed — the whole chain behind it was late before it even started. Negative wiggle room! The chart looked terrifying, but it did its job: it measured *exactly* how big the problem was, months early, while there was still time to act — build faster, ship differently, or renegotiate the date honestly. A schedule's job isn't to look pretty. It's to tell you the truth while the truth is still fixable.

TRY IT (5 MINUTES)

Take your task list. Draw arrows between tasks that must wait for each other.

Find your longest chain from start to finish. That's your critical path. Circle it in red.

Find the tasks with the built-in waits — shipping, approvals, rising dough, drying paint. They're almost always on the

red chain. Start those FIRST.

REMEMBER THIS

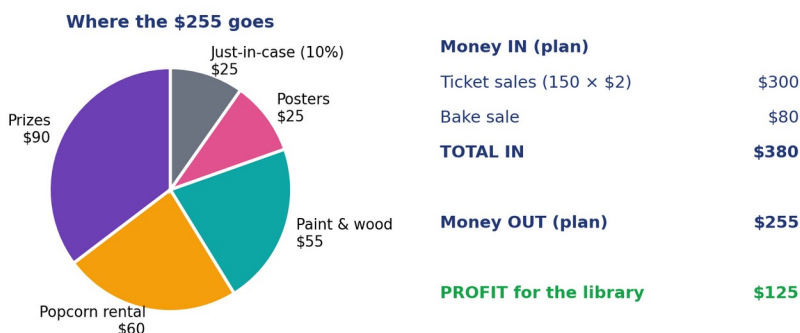
The longest chain of must-wait tasks decides your finish date. Know your chain, start its waiting-tasks early, and guard it like treasure.

CHAPTER 8

Follow the Money

Dev's job. He made a two-column list — money OUT (what the fair costs) and money IN (what it earns) — and then did the thing that separates real budgets from wish lists:

He added a line called **just-in-case: \$25** — about 10% extra. “For the thing we forgot,” he said. “There's always a thing we forgot.”



The three budget rules

1. **Spend on paper first.** Every planned cost gets written down **before** anyone buys anything. If the OUT number is bigger than the IN number, you fix it now — with an eraser, not with regret.
2. **Add just-in-case money (about 10%)** and treat it like a fire extinguisher: it exists, everyone knows it exists, and nobody touches it for fun. Pros call it **contingency**.
3. **Track as you spend.** Dev kept every receipt and updated one sheet: **planned vs. actually spent**. When paint came in \$8 over, he saw it the same day — and trimmed the prize order by \$8 to stay level. Small fix, made early. That's the entire secret of budgets.

Notice what the plan shows: tickets and bake sale bring in \$380, the fair costs \$255, so the library gets about **\$125** — beating the \$100 promise from Chapter 4. The goal isn't just written on the charter anymore. It's **arithmetic**.

FROM A REAL PROJECT DESK

Real projects track money exactly like Dev's sheet — planned vs. actual, line by line — just with more zeros. And here's the pro-level trick: they compare money **to progress**, not just to the calendar. Spending half the budget is fine **if half the work is truly done**. Spending half the budget with a quarter of the work done is a fire alarm. Money spent isn't progress. Work finished is progress.

TRY IT (5 MINUTES)

Budget your project on one page: money OUT (every cost you can think of), money IN (where it comes from), plus 10% just-in-case.

If $OUT > IN$, change the plan now: shrink scope, find cheaper options, or raise more. Erasers are free.

REMEMBER THIS

Plan the money, add 10% just-in-case, track planned vs. actual — and remember: money spent is not the same as work done.

CHAPTER 9

Make It Good: The Quality Question

Two weeks before the fair, Leo finished the ring-toss booth and declared it done.

Mei tossed a ring. It bounced off the bottle, off the table, and into the mud. She tossed nine more. Zero landed. “Leo,” she said, “nobody will play a game nobody can win.”

Leo had built the booth. He hadn't built a **good** booth. And that's the difference between **done** and **quality**.

Decide what 'good' means BEFORE you build

Quality isn't “make everything perfect.” Perfect is expensive and slow. Quality means: **decide, in advance, what good-enough looks like — then check against it.** The team wrote quality checks for their biggest pieces:

- **Games:** a regular kid wins a small prize about 1 try in 3. (Fun = winnable-but-not-easy.)
- **Food table:** napkins, a trash can within ten steps, and nothing that melts in the sun.
- **Money:** two people count the cash box together, always. Not because anyone's a thief — because two counters make zero mistakes.
- **The whole fair:** a full walk-through the day before, playing every game like a customer.

Then they **tested early**. Mei's ten-ring test took ninety seconds and saved fair day, because Leo had two weeks to move the bottles closer — instead of watching kids walk away on the day itself. The earlier you test, the cheaper the fix. The day-before walk-through caught three more little things (no tape for the posters, no scissors, no change for a \$20). Ninety minutes, three saves.

FROM A REAL PROJECT DESK

On serious projects — hospitals, power plants — 'good' is written down before work starts, and a task only counts as **done** when someone can *see and check* it's done: a drawing issued, a weld inspected, a test passed. There's a rule on real project desks worth stealing for life: **'almost done' counts as not done**. If it can't be checked, it can't be counted.

TRY IT (5 MINUTES)

For your project's three most important pieces, finish this sentence for each: "This is good if ____." Make it checkable — numbers help.

Schedule one test *before* the real day. Play your own game. Eat your own recipe. Run your own slideshow, out loud, with a timer.

REMEMBER THIS

Define 'good' before you build. Test early, when fixes are cheap. And 'almost done' counts as not done.

CHAPTER 10

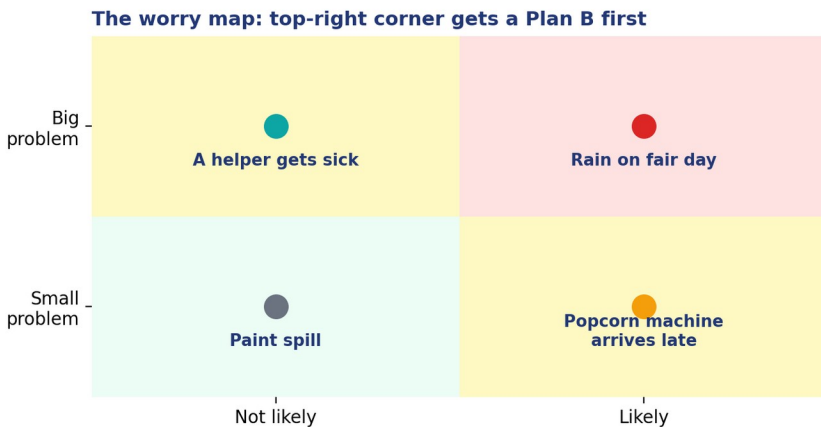
What Could Go Wrong? (Ask On Purpose)

One evening Zara asked the question most people avoid:
“Okay — what could wreck this?”

“Rain,” said everyone at once.

“What else?” The list grew: the popcorn machine ships late. A helper gets sick. Paint spills on the schoolyard. Nobody shows up. Somebody loses the cash box.

Saying worries out loud feels like jinxing it. It's the opposite. A worry you've named is a worry you can plan for. Pros call these **risks**, and they hunt them on purpose.



Sort, then plan — biggest first

Not every worry deserves a plan. The worry map sorts them with two questions: *how likely is it?* and *how bad would it be?* Then you plan for the top-right corner first.

- **Rain (likely + big) → change the plan itself:** book the gym as a rain venue NOW, not on fair morning. Decision by noon the day before. This is why the rain

plan was already on the one-page promise — big risks move in early.

- **Popcorn machine late (likely + small-ish) → reduce the odds:** order one week earlier than needed, and get the rental's phone number for a Tuesday check-in call.
- **Helper sick (unlikely + big) → have a backup:** every station gets a trained backup person. One sick friend shouldn't equal one closed booth.
- **Paint spill (unlikely + small) → shrug:** put down newspaper and move on. Some risks you just accept. That's allowed — as long as it's a *decision*, not a surprise.

One more pro move: risks aren't all bad. “What if *way* more people come than we planned?” is a **good** risk — an opportunity. The team planned for it too: extra popcorn kernels in the closet, and Dev printed 50 spare tickets. Being ready for good luck is also project management.

FROM A REAL PROJECT DESK

Real projects keep a **risk register** — a living list of what could go wrong, how big, and what we're doing about it — reviewed *every single week*, because risks change. The projects that get wrecked are almost never wrecked by unknowable lightning bolts. They're wrecked by things that were sitting on somebody's worry list, unplanned-for.

TRY IT (5 MINUTES)

Set a 5-minute timer and list every way your project could go wrong. No filtering — silly ones welcome.

Put each on the worry map. For the top-right corner, write one sentence each: “If __ *happens*, we *will* __.” That sentence is a Plan B. Two or three are usually plenty.

REMEMBER THIS

Name your worries on purpose, sort them by likely × bad,

and give the big ones a Plan B — before you need it.

CHAPTER 11

Keep Everyone in the Loop

Week four, the project nearly fell over — and not because of rain or prizes.

Mei changed the bake-sale drop-off from Thursday to Friday morning... and told the team group chat. But the parent bakers weren't *in* the group chat. Thursday afternoon: twelve confused parents, four dozen homeless cupcakes, one very patient librarian directing tray traffic.

Nothing was broken. Everyone was working hard. The information just didn't reach the people who needed it. **Most project disasters are communication disasters wearing a costume.**

WHO	WHAT they need	HOW + WHEN
● Principal (said YES)	Big news + weekly 2-line update	Email, Fridays
● The team (does the work)	Everything, fast	Group chat, daily
● Helpers & bakers	What to bring, where, when	One clear message + reminder
● Everyone at school	Come to the fair!	Posters + morning announcement

The fair's who-needs-to-know grid. Ten minutes to make, saves ten cupcake emergencies.

The three loop rules

1. **Different people need different amounts.** The team needs everything, fast. The principal needs two lines on Fridays. The bakers need one crystal-clear message with what, where, when — and a reminder. Sending everyone everything means nobody reads anything.
2. **Updates run on a schedule, not on a mood.** Zara's Friday note to Principal Ortiz was two lines: *what happened this week, what's next, any problems.*

Boring? Extremely. But when Zara eventually needed help, the principal already knew the whole story. Trust is built two lines at a time.

3. **Bad news travels FIRST.** When the popcorn rental called with a delay, Zara told the team within the hour — not hoping it would fix itself. Said early, a problem has ten solutions. Said late, it has zero and an argument.

FROM A REAL PROJECT DESK

Real project managers send a weekly status update with the same three beats — done this week, next week, problems & help needed — to people running billion-dollar jobs. The single most respected sentence in the profession is: **“Here's a problem, here's what I recommend.”** Hiding bad news is how project managers get fired. Surfacing it early is how they get promoted.

TRY IT (5 MINUTES)

Make your project's who-needs-to-know grid: WHO / WHAT they need / HOW + WHEN.

Write one practice status update, three beats, four sentences max: Done. Next. Problems. Send it to your sponsor. Watch what it does to how much they trust you.

REMEMBER THIS

Right info, right person, right time — on a schedule. And bad news goes first, always.

CHAPTER 12

Track It, Fix It, Finish It

The last two weeks, the team ran on one ritual: ten minutes, Mondays, by the task wall — three columns of sticky notes labeled **TO DO / DOING / DONE**.

Each Monday, every note either moved right, or its owner said what was stuck. No blame — just Zara's two questions: **“What does this need?”** and **“Is it on the red chain?”** When “build booths” sat in DOING for two straight weeks, nobody pretended. Leo said “I need hands,” Dev joined him Saturday, and the note moved. **A task wall only works if it tells the truth** — a note sitting in DOING for weeks isn't doing, it's stuck, and stuck things need help, not hope.

Fair day

It rained. Of course it rained.

And it didn't matter — because at noon on Thursday, exactly as written in the Plan B, Zara made the call and the fair moved to the gym. Mr. Coyle had the tables up by three. The popcorn machine (ordered a week early, checked on Tuesday) was already there. The games worked, because they'd been played on Wednesday. The bakers knew the new drop-off, because this time the message went to **their** list.

Three hundred and forty tickets. The librarian cried a little.



Fair day. It rained. It did not matter.

Finishing is a stage, not a moment

Saturday morning, the team did the unglamorous half of greatness:

- **Counted the money — two people, together.** In: \$412. Out: \$263. **To the library: \$149.** Promise was \$100. Beaten.
- **Returned everything** — popcorn machine, speakers, Mr. Coyle's tables (with a thank-you donut).
- **Thanked every single helper by name.** People remember two things about a project: how it ended, and whether anyone said thank you.
- **Held the ten-minute lessons talk:** *What worked? What didn't? What would we do differently?* They wrote half a page — order rentals even earlier; make the bakers' list on day one; the walk-through was the best 90 minutes of the project. That half-page is a gift to next year's team. Pros call it **lessons learned**, and skipping it is how the same mistakes happen twice.

- **Celebrated.** Pizza. Non-negotiable. Teams that celebrate come back for the next project. Teams that just stop... stop.

FROM A REAL PROJECT DESK

Real projects end the same way, scaled up: final counts checked by two sets of eyes, equipment handed back, a close-out report, a lessons meeting, and yes — usually pizza. Closing well is a skill. The world is full of 95%-finished projects; finishers are rare, and everybody wants them on the next team.

REMEMBER THIS

Track honestly (TO DO / DOING / DONE), fix what's stuck, and finish ALL the way: count it, return it, thank them, learn, celebrate.

Your Project Toolkit

Four one-page tools. Copy them into a notebook and you can run anything.

Tool 1 · The One-Page Promise (Chapter 4)

Question	Your answer
WHAT are we making?	
WHY? (goal with a number)	
WHEN is it done?	
WHO is on it? Who's the sponsor?	
HOW MUCH will it cost?	
What do we NEED from the sponsor?	

Tool 2 · Task List & Schedule (Chapters 6-7)

Task (starts with a verb)	Owner	Needs to wait for...	Week	On the red chain?

Tool 3 · Money Sheet (Chapter 8)

Money OUT	Planned \$	Actual \$

Money OUT	Planned \$	Actual \$
Just-in-case (10%)		
TOTAL OUT		

Money IN	Planned \$	Actual \$
TOTAL IN		
LEFT FOR THE GOAL (in – out)		

Tool 4 · Worry List (Chapter 10)

What could go wrong (or right!)	Likely ?	How bad/good?	Our Plan B (one sentence)

Talk Like a Pro

Twenty words that make adults' eyebrows go up. You now know all of them for real.

The word	What it really means
Project	Something new you make, with a goal, a start, and a finish
Operations	The repeating work that keeps things running (not a project)
Project manager	The keeper of the plan — leads the pieces, not bosses the people
Sponsor	The person with the power to say YES and unlock what you need
Stakeholder	Anyone the project touches or who cares how it goes
Charter	The one-page promise the sponsor approves. The project's birth certificate
Scope	What's IN and what's OUT. The line you drew
Scope creep	'Just one more thing...' repeated until the project sinks
Change request	Asking the sponsor properly before the plan changes
Work breakdown	The task tree: big goal → chunks → one-person tasks
Deliverable	A finished thing you can point at (a booth, a poster, \$149)
Dependency	When one task must wait for another to finish
Milestone	A big checkpoint moment (the YES, all booths done, fair day)
Critical path	The longest must-wait chain — it decides your finish date
Float	Spare wiggle room a task has before it delays

The word	What it really means
	anything
Budget	The money plan: out, in, and tracked against reality
Contingency	Just-in-case money (or time) for the thing you forgot
Risk	A named worry (or a lucky chance!) with a Plan B ready
Status update	Done / Next / Problems — on a schedule, bad news first
Lessons learned	The half-page of wisdom you leave for the next team

Now go make something happen

Here's the thing nobody tells you: the four friends aren't special. They didn't have money, power, or a single superpower between them. They had a goal, a page with a YES on it, a task tree, a calendar with a red chain, a money sheet, a worry list, and a Monday ritual.

That's it. That's the whole toolkit — and it's the same one, piece for piece, that builds hospitals, launches games, and puts robots on other planets. The projects get bigger. The tools don't change.

So pick something. A club. A fundraiser. A short film. A garden. Something that doesn't exist yet and should.

Write the one-page promise. Find your sponsor. Draw the line. Break it down. Find the red chain. Count the money. Name the worries. Keep the loop. Track it honestly. Finish all the way — and eat the pizza.

**The world belongs to people who finish things.
Starting today, that's you.**

FOR PARENTS & TEACHERS

This book teaches the genuine core of professional project management — initiation, scope, breakdown structures, critical-path scheduling, budgeting with contingency, quality, risk, communications, monitoring, and close-out — through one continuous story, in plain language. Every tool is a simplified version of its industry counterpart, informed by real project-controls practice. It pairs naturally with any group project, science fair, or service activity: hand a team Chapter 4 and ask for their one-page promise.