

22 Immutable Laws of Project Management: A Guide for the Enlightened

November 6, 2024



Hey there, fellow project management warriors! One of my favorite books, that I first read many years ago, and that I still refer to today is ‘The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing’ by Al Ries and Jack Trout. Over the years it has served me well - even as a project manager. Its no nonsense approach to Marketing and the humor with which it shares the critical laws of the discipline.

Well I wanted to create a version of this great book for project management. To capture some of the critical laws that I think every practitioner should abide by. And to be clear these laws that I present here, are hard-won wisdom, from the battlefield and trenches of project management gathered over my 25-year career in project management.

Drawing inspiration from the legendary “22 Immutable Laws of Marketing,” I’ve crafted a set of timeless principles to guide you on your project journeys. So, buckle up, grab a coffee, and let’s jump head first into the 22 Immutable Laws of Project Management.

1. The Law of Leadership: ‘Oh Captain, My Captain’ Be the Captain, Not the Cabin Crew

Every project needs a strong leader, someone who can steer the ship through stormy seas and keep the crew motivated. Don’t be afraid to take charge, even if it means occasionally shouting “Abandon ship!” (just kidding, don’t do that, well unless you must!).

2. The Law of the Category: Define Your Project’s Purpose

What's the point of your project? Is it to build a bridge, develop a new software, or simply build a new pantry for your family? Clearly define your project's purpose, or risk becoming lost in a sea of ambiguity. All the fancy methodology in the world will be no good if your project fails to serve in its primary functions.

3. The Law of the Mind: Own Your Stakeholders' Minds

Stakeholders can be fickle creatures. One minute they're your biggest fans, the next they're demanding a full re-plan. To keep them happy, you must own their minds. This means clear communication, regular updates, and the occasional placation. Let's face it a well-timed thank-you note never hurts!

4. The Law of Perception: Perception is Reality

In the world of project management, perception is everything. If your stakeholders think your project is a disaster, it doesn't matter how well it's actually going. So, spin that narrative, paint a positive but accurate picture, and own the story of the success you plan to deliver.

5. The Law of Focus: Less is More

Trying to juggle too many projects at once is a recipe for disaster. Focus on one project at a time, and you'll be more likely to succeed. Remember, it's better to do one thing well than ten things poorly. That is unless you a Programme or Portfolio lead, in which case that's your role. So juggle with pride.

6. The Law of Exclusivity: Stand Out from the Crowd

In a world of countless projects, how do you make yours stand out? Be unique, be different, be unforgettable. Maybe you could add a clown to your project team, or have your meetings in a hot air balloon. In most cases the obvious standout quality is for you to be a great project leader. But whatever route you choose just make sure it's something your team and stakeholders will remember.

7. The Law of the Ladder: Climb the Ladder, One Rung at a Time

Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither is your project. Break your project down into smaller, manageable tasks, and tackle them one by one. Don't try to climb the entire ladder in one leap, or you'll end up falling flat on your face.

8. The Law of Duality: Two Sides to Every Story

Every project has two sides: the good and the bad. Don't be afraid to acknowledge the challenges you're

facing, but always focus on the positive. After all, a little optimism can go a long way.

9. The Law of the Opposite: Sometimes You Have to Go Against the Grain

Don't be afraid to challenge the status quo. If everyone else is doing it one way, maybe there's a better way. Just be prepared to defend your ideas, and don't be surprised if people think you're crazy.

10. The Law of Division: Divide and Conquer

Big projects can be overwhelming. Break them down into smaller, more manageable tasks, and delegate them to your trusted team members. Remember, there's strength in numbers, and a team of monkeys can achieve more than a single genius.

11. The Law of Perspective: Change Your Perspective, Change Your Results

Sometimes, all it takes is a change of perspective to solve a problem. Step back, take a deep breath, and look at the situation from a different angle. You might be surprised at what you discover. Project managers are adept at seeing multiple perspectives, hone this superpower and be the person in the room that sees things differently.

12. The Law of Line Extension: Don't Dilute Your Brand

Stick to what you're good at. Don't try to be everything to everyone, or you'll end up being nothing to anyone. Focus on your core competencies, and you'll be more likely to succeed. Achieving deep domain knowledge coupled with broad industry insight is the way to accelerate your path to success.

13. The Law of Sacrifice: You Can't Have It All

Every project involves trade-offs. You can't have it all, so you have to make choices. Prioritize your tasks, and be willing to give up something to achieve your critical goals.

14. The Law of Attributes: Don't Be All Things to All People

Focus on your project's key strengths, and don't worry about trying to be perfect. Remember, it's better to be good at one thing than mediocre at everything.

15. The Law of Candor: Tell the Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing But the Truth

Honesty is the best policy, especially in project management. If you're struggling, admit it. If you've made a mistake, own up to it. Your stakeholders will appreciate your honesty, and it will build trust in the long run.

16. The Law of Singularity: Focus on One Big Idea

Don't try to boil the ocean. Focus on one big idea, and execute it flawlessly. A single, well-executed idea is worth more than a dozen half-baked ones.

17. The Law of Unpredictability: Expect the Unexpected

Things rarely go according to plan. Be prepared for the unexpected, and be flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances. After all, the only constant in project management is change.

18. The Law of Success: Success Breeds Success

Once you've achieved success on one project, it's easier to achieve success on the next. Use your past successes to build momentum and inspire your team.

19. The Law of Failure: Failure is an Opportunity to Learn

Don't be afraid to fail. Every failure is an opportunity to learn and grow. Embrace your mistakes, and use them to improve your future projects.

20. The Law of Hype: Don't Overpromise and Underdeliver

Set realistic expectations, and don't make promises you can't keep. Overpromising and underdelivering is a surefire way to lose the trust of your stakeholders.

21. The Law of Acceleration: The Rate of Change is Accelerating

The pace of change is accelerating, and project managers need to keep up. Embrace new technologies, new methodologies, and new ways of thinking.

22. The Law of Resources: Resources Are Limited

No matter how big your budget is, your resources are always limited. Use your resources wisely, and don't

waste them on things that don't add value.

I hope these **22 Immutable Laws of Project Management** have been helpful. Remember, project management really is a journey, not a destination. Enjoy the ride and learn the lessons and be resilient enough to come back for more. After all, we're all just trying to make the world a better place, one project at a time.