

The losers olympics

Project Failure

Projects fail for one main reason: They do not provide value to the business.

This is often due to the business problem not being understood and the failure to define clear goals and targets for the project.

Projects in this category stand a very good chance of winning the Losers Olympics! The winner of the Losers Olympics is the team who can spend as much money as possible without winning any events!

The Losers Olympics

The events in the Losers Olympics are the same as the proper Olympics, only the prizes are different. The winners of the real Olympics collect gold medals and multi million pound sponsorship deals. The winners of the Losers Olympics win nothing more than pats on the back and sympathy from other Losers who were equally confused as to how they lost.

A Previous Event

Let's look back in fictitious history and examine the largest losers in the field entering an event in the last Losers Olympics. Before they entered the event the team were briefed by their manager, Mr Loser, with the following information:

- o You must design and build a bow and arrow set that is really accurate and will help us win on the day.
- o You will be required to hit lots of target boards really quickly so it also must not break otherwise we will lose time.
- o If we win we will get lots of sponsorship and make lots of money. The event takes place in four weeks time.
- o Bring your skiing equipment.

The Preparation

During the next four weeks the team built a really 'cool' bow and arrow set. They tested it in their back garden and got really accurate with it and were also pretty quick with it.

They also bought some holiday skis from a local sports shop and were ready. Being complete losers they were confident they were going to win the real event.

Event Day Arrives

The day of the event arrived and all the teams gathered for the event. It was time for the losers to try and win. They positioned themselves with their bow and the gun went off for them to start.

The first target board travelled in from the left and went over to the right. They fired 5 arrows at it and each one missed. Their bow was pretty heavy, so moving its direction was hard work which hampered the ability to be accurate. The losers hadn't anticipated this since they assumed the targets would be stationary.

Rather than go for the next moving target they instead fired 3 shots in to the bulls eye of each stationary target on the left and the right. They were most pleased with themselves.

The next 50 targets continued to move in one at a time from various directions and they managed to hit the outside of five of them.

For the last section of the event two targets moved in at the same time and crossed in the centre. This was repeated 10 times with new pairs of targets. The team had no chance of hitting both due to the inability to move the bow and get the accuracy, so they concentrated on the left hand target each time and managed to hit it twice before they ran out of their initial fifty arrows.

They were very tired after lifting the heavy bow, but still put their skis on and skied up the hill to the finish line. They took twice as long as other teams due to the weight of their skis. They didn't know they were going to have to ski uphill.

Well, it comes as no surprise that they scored the least number of points.

Why They Lost

Here's the reasons for their dismal failure:

- o The stationary targets weren't even part of the game so should not have been hit.

- o The pairs of targets had to both be hit to score any points.
- o Each pair of targets was worth 20 points compared to 5 for each single target. They should have rationed their arrows better.
- o The weight of the bow meant they completely lost accuracy.
- o They had designed their bow to be accurate enough to hit a stationary bulls eye. This was irrelevant since points were scored for hitting a target anywhere.
- o They had no idea they were going to have to ski uphill. If they had known they would have spent money on lighter skis to make the climb easier.
- o They spent £50,000 on development of the bow and £1,000 on skis. Each part of the event had equal points, but they focused too much on one area.
- o If they had won, the sponsorship deal was only worth £10,000 a year, so their return on investment was negative. They would have been better off going to a casino and putting the money on the spin of a wheel.

The team members were very annoyed since they had followed the instructions Mr Loser had given them but failed to win the event.

Mr Loser however, was delighted. He had won the Losers Olympics. His tactics of being vague on instructions had worked. The team did not stand a chance. And with no one watching over him he hailed the whole project a success!

Back to Reality

Getting back to reality, there is no such thing as the Losers Olympics of course, but if there was then there would be so many projects in IT that would stand a really good chance of winning it. Unfortunately if you win the Losers Olympics, you lose the real Olympics, and that is where the money is.

Here are some guidelines to help your project succeed to win its REAL Olympic event:

- o Fully understand how the game is played (the current process).
- o Understand how the game is scored (define measures)
- o Understand how many points you need to score to win (clear goals and targets)
- o Practice your event regularly to see if you are going to win (iterative development with feedback on measurements)

If you are currently working in an IT project then ask yourself how you'll know when you are over the line? Can you measure objectively how well you are currently doing?

If not then you might be entering the Losers Olympics and it could be time to think about making a difference or moving on to join a winning team.

An contractor, from London

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