

## DILBERT ISN'T REAL

As I read Michael Hatfield's piece ("To the Rescue," November 2007), I was waiting for the other shoe to drop. "Ha!" he would write, "I tricked you!" But no! He really was writing about senior executives plotting stupidity.

Oh, come on!

While this may have been intended as a humorous piece, it belies (and supports) the too-widely held idea that Dilbert's boss inhabits our boardrooms. Mr. Hatfield's tongue may have been firmly planted in his cheek (at least I hope it was), but I can guarantee that many readers felt a real kinship to the characters in his tale.

News flash! Dilbert's boss is fictitious. He does not work for your company!

Every senior executive in your company wants it to thrive. Every one of them really wants to do what is right (with the very rare criminal exceptions). Every one of

them is making the best possible decisions every day, based on the information that he or she has at hand.

"But," you may protest, "they make such dumb decisions!"

Granted. Senior executives sometimes make horrendous mistakes. Yet, in all but the few cases of outright fraud, those mistakes are made with the best of intentions, with the expectation that they are the right things to do. They are bad decisions merely because the information at hand was insufficient, or worse, incorrect.

And whose fault is that? Look in the mirror!

If we have not been persistent and consistent in providing them with the information they need to make good decisions, then we share the blame. When we have the information they lack and fail to make it clear to them, our failure contributes mightily to their error, making it our error as well.

Is our input always going to be welcomed? Hardly. But that is not the point. As professionals, it is our duty to tell the truth and provide vital information, whether our message is popular or not.

To do anything else is a breach of our ethical imperative. To withhold the truth is to quietly, stealthily lie.

Later in the same issue, in "Do the Right Thing," LeRoy Ward, PMP, PgMP, is quoted as saying about professional ethics: "You have only one opportunity to give up your integrity, and then it's really hard to get it back." I assert that "really hard" is a gargantuan understatement.

So, it is up to you. Are you going to play the part of Dilbert's boss, doing the dumb thing to protect your own posterior? Or are you going to exercise your integrity and give your executives the information they sorely need, but lack?

## AND THEN ...

In complaining about Carol Hildebrand's article "Full Speed Ahead" (October 2007) in the December Feedback, Stephen Wilson, PMP, claimed his view was based on his experience using agile techniques. Clearly, if he has experience with techniques claiming to be "agile," they bear no resemblance to agility as it is intended.

He posited: "The agile method seems to be, 'spend what you need and when you run out, we will ask for more.'" That approach is not agile; it is irresponsible. The agile approach is to time-box (which effectively budget-boxes) the project, and to deliver the greatest possible customer value within those constraints. This agile approach is more responsible than the traditional approach of forcing the customer to accept what was specified at the beginning of the project (regardless of what has been learned in the meantime) and charging them through the nose for "change requests."

Far from being fiscally irresponsible, the agile approach (coupled with the agile precept that we deliver the greatest customer value first) results in projects that deliver high value on time and within budget.

A well-disciplined agile project will never demand more money of its customer. Collecting the high value that has been developed and ceasing to invest in the project is always the customer's choice.

In addition, Mr. Wilson claimed agility "promulgates a feature in-scope/out-of-scope feeding frenzy during a post-development testing phase." This statement convinces me he has never been involved in a truly agile project. Agility means that the customer is involved throughout the project so that the product can never deviate far from his or her expectations and needs. The customer is doing product acceptance incrementally throughout the project and with acceptance of the final increment of the product, he or she has accepted the whole product. It is ready for deployment. There is no such thing as a "post-development testing phase" in an agile project.

Of course, to make agility work, the customer must be fully engaged throughout the project. As Mr. Wilson correctly observed, this is a challenging proposition because the customer has a "real" job to do, and the software project represents additional demands. Customers are often unwilling to invest so much effort in their software projects. (But this is not a new problem; it plagues us in the traditional methods as well!)

And if our customer is willing to invest the necessary time to collaborate with an agile development team, the promise of agility—the greatest possible customer value within time and budget constraints—is within reach.

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## CORRECTION

On page 9 of *2008 Leadership in Project Management*, Buenos Aires should have been referred to as a city in Argentina.

