

# Closure Crisis

---

By Trish Thomas, Owner of Akamai Consulting, LLC

*Closing out projects cleanly and completely is a struggle for many consultants. In my years of working with business owners to transform their companies, I've realized that it's a problem for most clients too. Maybe they have new policies and procedures to implement. Maybe they need to draft all new forms. Maybe the company website needs an overhaul. Whatever the internal 'project' might be, closure is critical to progress.*

We've all been there... You've got a project on the table and things are moving along nicely. You made a plan, gathered materials, conducted research, created rough-drafts, reviewed a myriad of options with your team - you're almost there! But, then things bog down. You can't seem to get the final version complete. Or maybe you complete all the hard materials and can't implement your new procedures and objectives. Whatever the roadblock is – you can't seem to find closure. The project drags on and on until everyone loses interest altogether. You never see the results of your work because of not finishing what you started.

It's a common problem and there are concrete ways to set your team up to succeed. Here are some tips on fixing the 'closure crisis':

Set a timeline for completion when you start a project. This is critical! Most leaders don't have the guts to put deadlines on little tasks and projects that are going on within their business. It's tough to look at something simple like publishing an updated edition of the employee handbook and think that it won't be complete in a few months, but without a clear goal in sight, it probably won't get done. Create a mindset of closure from the outset by scheduling a wrap up meeting when you start a job. Keep the project end date in the forefront of everyone's mind, and push toward that goal by monitoring progress at regular intervals as you move forward.

Recognize that delays (however subconscious) represent a resistance to change. Most leaders assume that delays are only due to time constraints, lack of knowledge, coordination issues or other simple glitches. But endless project delays are a subtle expression of fear of change. When leaders become complicit in allowing delays to sabotage necessary work, they become part of the problem and not part of the solution. Address fear of change and procrastination up front. Your team needs to feel secure and confident in order to achieve the goals you lay out for them.

Don't be too flexible. A certain amount of flexibility is laudable. We obviously can't walk through the world being completely rigid in our thinking and relationships. However, owners and managers often tolerate unacceptable delays simply to maintain goodwill, and that level of flexibility is a detriment to your business. It will sap your productivity and convey a message to your team that you don't know how to close out an assignment. They will begin to assume that results don't matter and they just need to look busy and show signs of progress to meet your approval. There comes a point where you need to draw a line in the sand and demand closure.

Make tough calls! Many small projects linger indefinitely because there are a few key decisions that no one will make. Almost all the work is done, but there are a couple of questions that are stumping the team so they shirk from closure. Minor undecided issues can prevent assignments from reaching completion, and destroy your team's faith in you as a leader in the process. One of the most valuable traits of good leaders is that they call tough shots when no one else will. To avoid tension, annoyance and delays – make the tough calls.

In spite of superb planning and excellent leadership some jobs will take longer than expected, but there are clear steps you can take to give your projects the best chance for success. Work consciously through that last burst of activity that is required to hit your target end date. Use these simple tips to end sloppy endings to your projects and avoid the closure crisis.