

Mission Ready

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Never Accept A Mission Impossible

Many of us can remember the *Mission Impossible* television series—and certainly the recent Tom Cruise thrillers of the same title. And we are familiar with the opening refrain of each “impossible” challenge: “Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is.....”

Being a superhero, the Tom Cruise character does not walk away from the challenge, nor does he attempt to negotiate for better terms. He simply accepts the challenge, as it was presented to him: unconditionally.

When a General orders a soldier to “take that hill,” he does not anticipate a counter offer. He does not expect the soldier to say, “Here is what I’ll do: I’ll go half way up the hill, then you order artillery and air strikes, and I’ll work my way to the top. Do we have a deal?” The soldier can be expected to accept the order unconditionally.

We “corporate soldiers” are likewise expected by management, and by our customers, to accept our “orders” unconditionally. But the wise among us will not be afraid to emulate the soldier in the above example, and ask for *more*.

We’ve got to remember *there is always unrevealed margin in every critical mission* presented to us by our customer, or by our senior management. The true terms of the mission will never be revealed to us; margin will be withheld so that our managers or customers can create a little space between themselves and the end date, just in case things don’t go like clockwork. But don’t blame them; you would do the same thing. For example, let us imagine that you expect company during these upcoming holidays, and you want an interior decorator to make some much needed improvements. Your guests are expected to arrive

December 23rd. Would you tell your interior decorator that the work must be completed by Dec 23rd, or would you give yourself some wiggle room, and say, instead, that the work must be completed by Dec 1? And, if you have budgeted \$10,000 for the improvements, would you share that information with your contractor? Or would you, instead, tell him you might be able to scrape up \$ 8,000 for the project?

When our customers or bosses present us with difficult challenges, you can bet they are not telling the complete story; they have done what you would do under the same circumstances; they have cut themselves a little slack. Your job, while expressing enthusiasm for the project, is to ask for more.

If your managers won’t grant more time, ask for more budget. If they won’t give more budget, ask for more staff, more tools, more administrative support, more access to corporate resources. Believe it or not, your manager or customer will be impressed by your requests for more; they will see that you didn’t just fall off the turnip truck, and that you have a good grasp of what it will take to make their vision a reality.

Remember, even Marine Generals, when tasked with a mission that is out of their normal scope of operations, are not afraid to ask the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or Congress, for more logistical support, more firepower, more strategic flexibility, etc. Let the super heroes like Tom Cruise accept impossible missions unconditionally. You, if you’re wise, will probe into the depths of unrevealed margin, and bring out the tools and resources which will make your “mission impossible” a reality.