

## PROJECT MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES FROM THE TOP

### *Ginger Levin, PhD, OPM3 Assessor and Consultant*



*This is the sixth in an ongoing series of interviews with business executives, government officials, academics, and project managers published in the PMI NAC Newsletter.*

*Our goal is to present leading ideas and insights on the practice of project management for our readers.*

***Dr. Ginger Levin** is a Senior Consultant and Educator in project management. Her specialty areas include portfolio management, metrics, maturity assessments, and the Project Management Office.*

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To date in 2008 – Dr. Levin is the only person who holds all of the Project Management Institute’s credentials – a CAPM, PMP, and PgMP. She also is certified as an *OPM3* Assessor and Consultant.

Dr. Levin is a Lecturer for the University of Wisconsin-Platteville where she teaches in its M.S. in Project Management Program. She is an Adjunct Professor for Ecole Supérieure de Commerce de Lille (ESC Lille University) in France, where she teaches project management at the masters and doctoral level. She also is a Visiting Professor for RMIT in Melbourne, Australia.

As a consultant, she served as Project Manager in numerous efforts for Fortune 500 and public sector clients including Bank One, UPS, Citibank, General Electric, John Deere, Schreiber Foods, The Timken Company, New York City Transit Authority, Food and Drug Administration, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Prior to her work as a consultant, she held positions of increasing responsibility with the U.S. Government including the Federal Aviation Administration, Office of Personnel Management, and the General Accounting Office.

Dr. Levin is the co-author of Project Portfolio Management, Metrics for Project Management, Achieving Project Management Success with Virtual Teams, People Skills for Project Managers, Advanced Project Management Office – A Comprehensive Look at Function and Implementation, Essential People Skills for the Project Manager, The Business Development Capability Maturity Model, and the ESI PMP Challenge! PMP Study Guide, and the PgMP Study Guide.

Dr. Levin received her PhD in Information Systems Technology and Public Administration from The George Washington University in Washington, DC. She also received the Outstanding Dissertation Award for her research there on large organizations.

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**PMI-NAC: *Looking at your wide range of experience – private sector – public sector – and academia – what is it about PMI – and the PGMP in particular – that makes a difference for you?***

**Levin:** I grew up in Arlington, Virginia. From there I went to Wake Forest University for my undergraduate degree in business administration. Interestingly, I had a course there that covered the arrow diagramming method in some depth. Too bad it's no longer in vogue!

After graduation, I began a career in the Federal Government, starting as a management auditor for the U.S. General Accounting Office.

I then worked in five different government agencies and made my GS-15 by the time I was just 31. I moved around a lot – but there was always a common theme –transportation!

While in government for almost 14 years, I went to The George Washington University at night and earned a masters and doctorate from the School of Government and Business Administration. I worked full time for three degrees. It took 16 years – but was worth it.

After I earned my doctorate – I decided it was time to create my own destiny. I got another wonderful job in government! I came in on Monday – and found there had been a modest reorganization. That wonderful job – turned into something I really did not enjoy too much.

My friend, Dr. Greg Haugan, was taking early retirement so we formed our own consulting firm, GLH, Inc. *Come to the PMI meeting to learn why we chose GLH for our firm's name.* We had some great consulting projects. Other projects paid the rent and salaries of our small staff while we learned more about our careers in consulting.

In 1996, Greg decided he would move to southeastern Virginia and work only part time; and I decided I didn't want to run the company myself. This decision came about because during that winter of 1996 in DC – we had a great deal of snow. In many spots 20 or more inches fell. So much snow – I had to help my husband shovel it – something I had never needed to do in the past.

While helping my husband chop the snow and ice – I told him I had a better idea – move to Fort Lauderdale! He agreed. Shortly thereafter we headed south – and we have been rewarded well for it – except for the occasional hurricane.

I also joined PMI in 1996. Prior to that – Greg had been a member for some time. So I read all the materials he brought to the office. Our company then was fortunate to win a small contract from PMI to help with the development of training materials based on the 1996 PMBOK® Guide. This was a great contract for our firm and it helped me as well.

I contacted the PMI chapter and did some networking and then was invited to come to South Florida for an interview with Citibank. While I spent the day at the interview, which I thought went well – my husband was looking at homes and found our dream home. I saw it the next day and we put a deposit on it. While I was pleased with my interview, it turned out there was a more qualified person in the area who got that job. Despite that wrinkle, Citibank told me they liked me – and would find a position for me in time.

Thus, I decided to continue my consulting – but to do it from South Florida. A week before we were scheduled to move – Citibank called with a job for me. By then, I had a number of consulting projects under way – so instead I worked part-time – consulting for Citibank.

Living in South Florida and working on my own on various consulting projects in project management is just great. I also teach project management at the University of Wisconsin in Platteville in its online program. I serve as a Visiting Professor for RMIT in Australia in its doctoral program in project management – and I'm an Adjunct Professor for ESC Lille in its masters and doctoral programs in project management.

This balance of consulting and teaching is great fun. It keeps you on your toes to blend business and academic perspectives – with clients and students around the globe.

In the 1990s – I also became interested in the area of maturity modeling. A client and I presented on this topic at the 1997 PMI Annual Conference in Chicago. It was the first time I had been to a PMI Conference – and it was a special experience.

I enjoyed all the sessions, exhibits, and opportunities to network. In fact, I have attended these annual conferences every year since that time.

I got my CAPM in 2003 and my PMP in 2005. I then decided to be one of the first to get my PgMP. A lot of people asked me why I decided to get the CAPM. I had the experience for the PMP, but I wanted to see what the testing experience was like and whether a more “seasoned” student could do it! It went fine – as did my testing on the PMP later on.

Even though I have a doctorate from The George Washington University – having both the PMP and now the PgMP – provides a great deal of credibility with my clients and students around the world. I am thrilled to have these credentials. They show I have kept up with the field as it has progressed throughout the years.

In my progression through project management – I see these credentials as stepping stones in a way that has worked well for me. Some of you reading this may have had the talent and skill to go from running your first project to managing several projects all at once. If you haven't yet had the time to earn the PMP – you may be ready to succeed in earning the PgMP as your first PMI credential. You do not have to have your PMP to get your PgMP. Being a PMP is not a requirement from the PgMP. If you have the program management experience – you should just go for it!

**PMI-NAC: *From your standpoint – what is the value to candidates of earning the PGMP? And what does the PGMP credential in itself suggest about the broader goals / objectives of PMI itself?***

**Levin:** The PgMP shows that the project management profession has *truly* advanced. Project management is recognized worldwide as the profession of choice – and many organizations have embraced management-by-projects as core business philosophy.

However, PMI now understands we're not just managing or working on a single project most of the time.

We're often involved in larger initiatives, programs that consist of a number of projects that collectively deliver greater benefits than if they were managed separately.

This is why we now have the PgMP credential – to recognize our abilities in the program management field – as a natural evolution from the project management perspective.

***PMI-NAC: For those just learning about the PGMP and what it means in a PMI context, can you hit the high points on what it requires of the candidate – and do you have any data on the current number of individuals who are now PGMPs?***

***Levin:*** I don't have my fingertips on the exact number of people who have the PgMP today. In PMI Atlanta in October – PMI honored those of us who were in the pilot and had attained the credential. At the time – there were some 31 people in this category.

However, I know others now have received the credential. Earning the credential is a difficult process. It includes three major components – a detailed application review, a difficult examination, and then a multi-rater assessment of your actual experience as a program manager. This rating is done by a supervisor, peers, and team members.

***PMI-NAC: You have been identified as the only known holder of all of the PMI credentials including the CAPM, PMP, and PGMP. What does that say about your perspective on management science – and what trends do you see coming up?***

***Levin:*** In January 2008 – I was the only person with these credentials. I also am certified as a consultant and as an assessor in *OPM3*. I decided to earn these credentials because I wanted to be recognized as a thought leader and practitioner in project management.

My doctorate, earned in 1983, was not in project management – but instead was in public administration and information systems. At the time, project management was not offered as a specialty.

While I was a project management practitioner at the time I earned my doctorate – it was simply not a recognized field as it is today – with masters and doctoral degrees available from many institutions throughout the world.

But in the past 25 years – project management has come to be recognized in business and government circles as a true profession in its own right.

Because of this – and the increasing complexity of our technology, society, and the tools needed to manage programs and projects large and small – I believe the value of these PMI certifications will only increase in the future. People who earn project management degrees will be positioned as future leaders of private and public sector organizations.

Based on my experience in industry and government – today project management is the profession of choice.

**PMI-NAC:** *Were you surprised to learn you are the only person with all the PMI credentials – and how did you discover you were the sole individual with this special status?*

**Levin:** Yes – I was surprised. A representative from PMI contacted me and told me I was the only person with these credentials. She then interviewed me for an article in the *PMI Today* monthly publication. I was truly honored.

**PMI-NAC:** *What experiences / factors led you to get involved with PMI and Project Management?*

**Levin:** I had been a project manager in the U.S. Government – although I did not have that title at the time. I took one project management class in my undergraduate studies. I also was a senior staff member in a PMO established in the early 1980s at the Federal Aviation Administration – when it began its National Airspace Modernization Program.

When Dr. Haugan and I formed our consulting firm, we had three key areas of focus – project management, information systems, and organizational development.

Greg had been a leader early in his career on Cost / Schedule Control Systems Criteria (C/SCSC) and earned value analysis. He's also an expert on Work Breakdown Structures. Fortunately, Greg was an early member of PMI, and from him, I learned a great deal about project management – and PMI. Our project management consulting assignments were almost invariably the most interesting and challenging for us.

After all, as Tom Peters<sup>1</sup> said in 1999, “*All work is project work.*” We just did not think of it in this broad way until then! Some of the experiences we had made a big difference in our consulting practice. Some high points for us include the following:

We had a great project with Alcoa. In fact, a representative from Alcoa had been in one of our training classes and felt we would be great consultants.

It was exciting – and fun – because we had just purchased our office condominiums in Northern Virginia and the Alcoa people were coming to our offices to check us out! We had a rushed weekend to buy furniture to suggest we had been working there for some time. On this project, we were responsible for all their scheduling work. We used a PC product – TimeLine – and it was a rewarding experience as it was a complex project.

We would plot the schedule for various plants – and everyone involved had a positive attitude focused on success!

In a project for the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Finance Center (*they write all the checks and deposit savings for government employees*) – we won the contract to help NFC develop a project management methodology. It was interesting because at the same time – NFC was undergoing the Software Engineering Institute (SEI) Capability Maturity Model (CMM) for Software assessment process for it to be certified at Level 2 – so it was an exciting time in this agency.

We then won a contract for the Food and Drug Administration – which I used for my program management experience. This contract ran from 1991 to 1998. It had several projects associated with it – all performed for the Center of Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. Come to the PgMP class – and when we need a break – I’ll share details on what I learned from this project – of things NOT to eat!

**PMI-NAC:** *As a widely read author, project management educator and consultant – what do you see as some of the key challenges facing the project management profession in the next 3-5 years?*

**Levin:** The profession will continue to grow. To remain vital, it needs to attract new people and continue to energize and reward its existing members. To do so, it needs to continue to offer educational and networking opportunities through PMI and other associations so everyone continues to learn and broaden his or her perspectives.

Some key challenges to me are as follows: active integration of knowledge management with project and program management; actual usage of portfolio management as a “way of life” in organizations; an emphasis on what must be done to more effectively manage complex projects; and an emphasis on how we can build “swift trust” to work effectively in project and program teams – whether they are collocated or virtual.

I look forward to continuing to participate actively in PMI – and this fascinating profession! Come along to class May 2-3. You’ll be glad you did.

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Thanks to Ginger Levin for information about her business and teaching activities provided for use in this interview published in the PMI-NAC Newsletter.

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References:

1. Tom Peters, The Wow Project (1999), <http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/24/wowproj.html>, Issue 24 / April 1999, © All rights reserved. Fast Company, LLC ¥ Visit: <http://www.fastcompany.com/learning>