

PROJECT MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES FROM THE TOP

Lieutenant General (Ret.) Dan Petrosky, President, WestWind Technologies, Inc.



This is the third in an ongoing series of interviews with business executives, government officials, academics, and project managers to be published in the PMI NAC Newsletter. Our goal is to present leading ideas and insights on the practice of project management for our readers.

In this interview, Dan Petrosky discusses his thoughts about contemporary project management challenges at WestWind Technologies.

WestWind Technologies, Inc (WTI) is a locally owned and operated small business, supporting military aviation and rotorcraft requirements. WestWind services include engineering, manufacturing, integration, modification, and aircraft maintenance and support. WestWind's high standards in all areas are a sound foundation for diverse capabilities, including design engineering, technical publications, and complete kit manufacturing, along with integration and installation. Modifications WTI installs on aircraft include missile warning systems, crashworthy external fuel systems, search-and-rescue systems, and high-speed personnel insertion/extraction systems.

Visit <http://www.westwindcorp.com> for more information about WestWind Technologies.

PMI NAC: *What level of experience do you and your firm have with the Project Management Institute and its approach to the practice of project management?*

Petrosky: In just 7 years, WTI has grown from about 4 to nearly 400 employees. We grew rapidly. We were forced to mature our understanding and use of project management at a very fast pace.

As a very small startup, our focus was to become highly effective at developing and delivering quick turnaround, small-contract proposals in our business. Even today, we often produce five or more proposals a week.

Our business model is to rapidly respond to our customers. Our key driver in this effort is our capability to support the American Warfighter. Nothing out there is more important to our customer – or to the management and employees of WTI than to be able to provide rapid support to the American Warfighter. WTI grew rapidly and the need for project management maturity soon became clear. Evolved processes are critical to growing this or any business.

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In 2007, WTI became a PMI member. Now, with eight months behind us, we are developing a keen understanding of the steps we'll be taking to develop more rigorous business systems and more consistent business processes to help us evolve our project management capabilities.

PMI NAC: About how many PMI Project Management Professionals (PMP) do you have working at WTI, and how does WTI benefit through their participation in PMI?

Petrosky: Currently, we have two PMPs at WTI. But as I indicated, we are involved with PMI because we see a fit with the proven processes and approach developed by PMI and our need to constantly streamline and evolve our internal management effort and business model.

One of our PMPs has taken charge of developing a new business line that is very important to us – the CH-47 Helicopter Transportable Flight Proficiency Simulator. While this new business is near to our core business of manufacturing and installing helicopter modifications and assemblies – it represents a major advance for WTI to deliver a more complex, fully integrated end product to our customer.

Our relationship with PMI gives us new insights on how to extend and expand our engineering management processes to take on projects with greater scope and business risk.

PMI NAC: Does your firm have special requirements or emphasis areas in its use / application of project management skills and expertise?

Petrosky: In our business, speed and agility are of the essence. We are a very fast-paced provider to our customer. That requirement for speed also comes with the ironclad expectation that WTI will do the right work in the right manner every time.

Our customers – and our Warfighters – deserve no less from us. We can't let them down under any circumstances.

WTI is also a business. It is critically important to perform our work in a manner that earns a profit. In our small contract environment, we must be careful to avoid spending all of our budget studying a problem. That requires a great deal of management discipline as we look at the scope of projects and then structure our work to balance requirements for performance and customer satisfaction. It's a delicate balance.

PMI NAC: Can you share any examples on how WTI translates PMI project management principles and processes into results for your company and customers?

Petrosky: Our business model requires focus on assessing project risk with a great deal of precision. That is why we are doing project management from the PMI perspective.

To be effective, we must clearly understand business and technical risks as we develop each proposal. We can't afford to come to grips with the risks after the proposal is complete, and neither can our customers and end users.

Applying processes adapted from PMI allowed us to make our assessment efforts more rigorous. This one improvement has been a great benefit to us.

WTI is poised to deliver on a project this month under budget and on time. This achievement is vintage WestWind. Because of our exceptional efforts, we have been given the contract for more work. It's a win-win situation. WestWind will provide jobs for the community and support for our Warfighters. PMI project management principles have helped us to sharpen our competitive edge.

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PMI NAC: *What do you see as the key project management challenges facing WTI and other high-technology corporations in the Huntsville area over the next 5 years?*

Petrosky: First, let me point out that I'm not prepared to tell you much about the challenges other corporations in Huntsville will face in the years ahead. I am, however, in a position to tell you a great deal about the challenges and opportunities at WTI.

For WTI – key to our future is continuing to mature our capabilities at managing larger contracts of greater duration and that represent increasingly complex endeavors. That is the path we are on today. Grow our business, grow the size of our contracts, and stay true to the motivation, skills and experience we bring to the marketplace.

Central to our success is our ability to continue to provide a rapid response that is accurate and effective to help support our deploying forces anywhere in the world.

To do this, we will continue to perform those critical projects and activities that enhance our reputation as an agile provider of rotorcraft aviation products and services. Rapid prototyping followed by quick transition into high-quality, fast-paced production operations.

Today we are focused on what it will take for us to produce and deploy the next round of WTI products that serve the training and combat needs of our customers.

Over the longer term, we look to the challenges of larger projects that will require us to develop and refine our project management expertise to support more diverse technical and business processes.

WTI will continue to pursue these objectives in a systematic manner and produce results our customers can rely on. Our value proposition will continue to emphasize our success at being agile, accurate, and responsive to our customers.

In our business, the most important factor is the people we support and our WTI employees who support them. WTI employees and customers – together we share a commitment to do it right the first time. We owe that much to our country and our soldiers deployed around the world.

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