

Top Ten Rewards to Being a Program Manager

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#10: We acquire marketable skills that are in demand by both defense and private industry.

Program management skills are highly valued both inside and outside the government. Leading people and managing the cost, schedule, and performance of projects are universally important skills that are needed beyond the defense sector. Developing and honing these skills as government PMs makes us extremely marketable to private industry—according to the magazine *Chief Project Officer*, experience is the number one requirement when hiring a program manager.

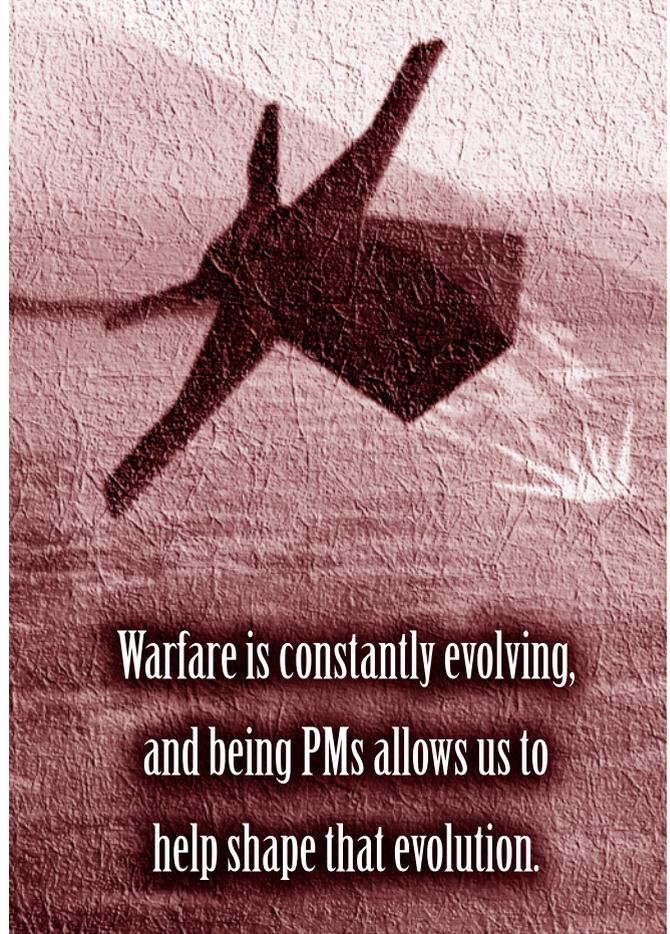
#9: The results of our efforts will shape how America goes to war for the next 30 to 40 years.

Warfare is constantly evolving, and being PMs allows us to help shape that evolution. For example, PMs were responsible for the development, testing, and fielding of the new command and control systems, aircraft, and precision-guided munitions. This example provides just one example of the impact program managers have made over the years on the efficiency and effectiveness of today's warfighter.

Right now, PMs are improving upon today's bombs, ships, tanks, and planes while developing tomorrow's weapon systems that will provide exciting, revolutionary new capabilities for our warfighters. The next generation of soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen will have unprecedented amounts of situational awareness, reach, stealth, endurance, surveillance, accuracy, speed, and precision with which to defend our nation.

#8: We can apply lessons learned to prevent future problems

Being a PM allows us the opportunity to learn from the mistakes and the successes of program managers before us. As PMs, we will continually be challenged as new problems arise and future risks emerge. However, we are not alone! Another PM has probably already dealt with a similar situation and either developed a solution or at least



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pinpointed a few pitfalls. By sharing information with our peers, predecessors, and successors, we can better manage the risks and even structure our programs to help avoid the problems altogether.

#7: We make and implement decisions.

I like making decisions—and as a PM, I am constantly called upon to do so. I often don't have perfect information, but even so, I can't wait too long before making and implementing the decision. Determining when to make a decision or when to wait for more information is a constant balancing act for PMs. When I am presented with recommendations on a pending decision, I often find myself more concerned about the "white space" in the information provided. What information was left out or omitted? What questions were not asked?

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As PMs, we cannot be afraid of making decisions and taking action. However, we also must not be afraid of admitting that we don't know the answer. If I don't know the answer, I say so—and then go and find it.

#6: We get to lead, and leading programs is exciting and rewarding.

Leadership is demanding, yet it is both exciting and rewarding. Being a PM provides many opportunities to lead. First, we start out by following and being part of a larger team where we are given projects to lead. Then we lead an entire program. Leading a program was one of my favorite assignments. Eventually, we may be asked to lead multiple programs.

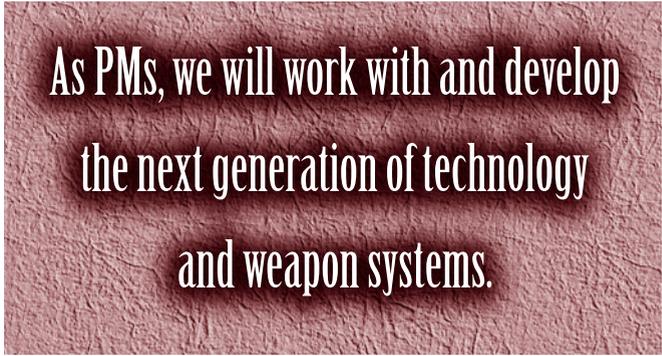
#5: We're judged by the objective measures of cost, schedule, and performance.

Success and failure in many other careers is measured subjectively, but a PM can be judged objectively, on how programs perform and whether they meet the cost and schedule objectives. In order to meet these objective measures, we all need to exhibit the utmost credibility and integrity. We need to ensure that we have set realistic cost, schedule, and performance goals. We cannot fall into the trap of being overly optimistic; instead, we need to clearly communicate with our warfighters so that we all have a shared expectation of what is possible. These expectations should be founded in the benchmarks and lessons learned from our predecessors.

When we lay out a program, we need to provide the warfighter with a continuum of options from which to choose. The warfighter is always going to want capability quickly, but we can't promise things we can't deliver. On one end of the continuum is the quickest possible point we could deliver capability, accompanied by the risks and cost to do it. On the other end is a program with enough funding and a reasonable schedule that we believe would be successful 90 percent of the time. In most instances, schedule and funding constraints will force our programs to fall somewhere in between the two extremes. In these instances, we need to clearly articulate with our warfighters how many of the program's capabilities we can provide and the associated risks they can expect, given the current level of funding and schedule. Where we get into trouble is making commitments to deliver things when we believe the funding or schedule is insufficient and then missing the commitment.

#4: We're on the cutting edge of tomorrow's systems.

PMs interface with all the new and emerging technology that the Department of Defense develops. Through our investment in science and technology, we are constantly on the lookout for new ways to apply the latest research and innovation to our warfighters' weapon systems. As



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#3: Over 50 percent of DoD's acquisition workforce is near retirement age.

We are approaching a critical juncture within the DoD acquisition community. Over half of our workforce will be eligible to retire within five years. We cannot afford to lose that much of the workforce without first gathering the lessons learned from all of their experience and expertise. We need additional PMs right now, and we need them to start learning now from our experienced workforce before it is too late.

#2: We experience and impact multiple aspects of government.

PMs interact across all aspects of the government and our society. Militarily, we report our progress to DoD and interface with our warfighters. We impact the economy at large through our interaction with the defense industry. Program managers work with Congress and its staffers to get authorization and funding for our programs.

While we personalize our programs, neither the program nor the funding is ours. The programs belong to the warfighters and the funding belongs to the taxpayers. PMs need to be stewards of the taxpayers' money. We need to be as efficient and prudent as possible. If our programs are unable to execute, we need to give back our excess funding.

#1: We do it for the challenge. It isn't easy!

I love a challenge. Being a PM means challenges every day. It challenges us to ask questions, make decisions, and to take action. It challenges us to learn from each other and to grow as leaders.

It is not easy to be a program manager, but it is truly exciting and rewarding!

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