

Look ‘em in the eye and ask “Is this your promise?”



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Let’s make it real to Last Planners[®]. There is a key moment every week on a design or construction project. It is the moment when the planning/scheduling “champion” (often superintendent or architect) points to each of the sticky-tag promises on the Weekly Work Plan and says to that foreman or designer, “Is this your promise?” and then waits for a verbal answer.

Prior to that moment, there have been many steps in the Implementation Strategy of the Last Planner System[®]: learning the difference between push and pull (as in Villego[®] simulations), exposure to concepts of flow and variation (as in Parade of Trades simulations), training in Last Planner System[®], creating that first Milestone Pull, Phase Pull and Weekly Work Plan.

Twenty years ago a seminal study by P. C. Nutt¹ found only a 35% success rate in implementing a new practice if it’s implemented by “edict”. But an 87% success rate if implemented with **facilitation**. That’s why lean trainers get hired to facilitate teams: to increase success. That same Nutt study suggests what happens when we don’t utilize such a complete and robust Implementation Strategy, “Failing to engage in [all of] the Exploration Stage activities creates black holes that consume leadership time dealing with continuing crises, scarce resources and so-called ‘resistance to change’.”

But too many teams think that once they’ve gotten past those early stages they have now implemented LPS[®]. They’re good to go. They know enough. They can wing it, coast along and just maintain the system. In so doing they doom themselves to failure.

The key to Last Planner[®] – the thing that makes the difference – is reliable promising. Every Last Planner[®] making and keeping promises 80%-90% of the time. That’s the key. It assures flow. It insures the meeting of milestones. And the “key to the key” is looking each man or woman in the eye, once a week, after careful consideration and saying, “Is this your promise?” and then waiting for that verbal answer. And then tracking PPC (Percent of Promises Complete) to assure they’ve kept that promise.

So there are two messages here: To launch Last Planner[®] System on your project, (a) work with experienced coaching to plan out a time-tested Implementation Strategy containing all the elements proven necessary to success, and (b) make sure that Implementation Strategy extends to that key moment every week in which the champion looks ‘em in the eye and asks “Is this your promise?” and then waits for a verbal answer.

¹ Reported in University of North Carolina Brief:

<https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/sites/nirn.fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/SISEP-Brief4-ExplorationStage.pdf>