

Hi Friends,

I have passed my PMP certification on 15th Sep 2012 with 4 Ps and 1 MP (Closing) in first attempt. First of all I would like to thank the almighty GOD for being with me throughout my journey to PMP certification. Secondly my sincere thanks to my wife and two kids (2 years and 4 years old) for supporting me during the long PMP preparation period, though my kids used to knock and bang at the door when I get locked up myself inside the room for studies. Next my thanks to all my supporters, including my family members (for their prayer), friends, PMZilla members (for Lessons learned, sample questions, hot discussions etc.), PMZilla team (for PMZilla final exam), PMZilla Admin (for his inspiring email), PM Prepcast team especially Cornelius Fischner (for his wonderful PMP preparation podcast), and all others who supported me directly or indirectly.

I have started my preparation in 2006! Astonished? I know... yes. But let me complete. I was attracted to PMP certification, when my PM told me that he is preparing for PMP certification. I also wanted to give a try that time but didn't plan properly. Just started with CBT Nuggets tutorials but didn't reach anywhere due to lack of planning.

For the second time I started my preparation in 2011 beginning, but failed again miserably without even registering for the exam.

Third time, in March 2012, I was more decided. First of all I looked back at my previous two attempts to understand why I couldn't succeed. I realized that only reason was lack of planning. So I will start my Lessons Learned with Planning.

❖ Planning.

- Created a plan in MS Project and did baseline it.
- Decided the material to be used during preparation. (Make sure you stick on to these materials during the study and don't change your plan during the preparation. Once you baseline your plan don't change it unless you feel change is unavoidable. Though you change your plan, first let it go through a change management process to make sure that change is required). Following are the materials I used for my preparation.
 - Books - PMBOK, Rita, and Headfirst PMP.
 - Training Videos – PM Prepcast and CBT Nuggets.
 - Forums – PMZilla and PM Prepcast.
 - Sample Tests – PM Fast Track, Oliver Lehman, Simplilearn, PM Perfect, Exam Central, Tech faq, Pm Success, BrainBOK, PMP Exam simulator, PM Study (Free and Paid), and finally tough PMZilla questions. (This may go through rolling wave planning since you will get more and more details about sample tests and their quality as you move forward).
 - Other resources – PMI Books online, PM Docs (lot of PM templates available here).

❖ Execution.

- I did register myself with PMI in February, 2012. I would urge everyone to join PMI as a member since the membership will give you a confidence that you are already part of PMI before certification itself.
- Next I purchased PM Prepcast. I purchased Pm Prepcast for mandatory 35 contact hours, but later realized that it would have been a big mistake if I didn't go for Prepcast. If I borrow Cornelius Fischner's words, "Prepcast gives you a much more entertaining

alternative to study for PMP exam, than just falling asleep while you reading the PMBOK guide". Really good stuff.

- Then after obtaining 35 contact hours, I submitted my PMP application as per plan. Before applying I made sure that all my previous managers are informed about this since I wanted to make sure their support if my application gets audited. Anyways my application got approved without audit process.
 - I was spending 1-2 hours during weekdays and 4 hours during weekend for my studies.
 - Read PMBOK guide 3 times, Rita 3 Times, Headfirst PMP once.
 - Prepared mind maps for summary of ITTOs.
 - Tried to understand the relationship of ITTO with each process. (How an input is used in the process, Why a T/T is required and how an output is generated).
 - Prepared notes on essential comparisons like Quality assurance vs. Quality audit, EEF vs. OPA etc.
 - Prepared brain dump and practiced it until I was 100% sure that I can recall brain dump within 10 minutes.
 - Since my company is not following proper project management practices, I decided to be familiar with all management plans and project documents mentioned in PMBOK guide. Project Management Docs (<http://www.projectmanagementdocs.com/>) web site helped me a lot for this.
 - Also I have compiled all Management plans and documents into a word file for easy reference.
 - Regularly visited PM Prepcast and PMZilla forums.
 - Reading lessons learned from others is a crucial factor for success.
 - Went through PMI articles and PM network magazine once in a while.
- ❖ Monitoring & Controlling.
- I made sure that everything goes according to plan by comparing actual progress against baseline plan.
 - When there is a deviation I took corrective action or preventive action.
 - Sometimes I had to develop workarounds when unplanned risks occurred.
 - An important factor during monitoring and controlling is Sample tests. Make sure that you attend at least 4-5 fulltime 4 hours mock exams.

- Following are my sample test results.

Sample Test	Score
PM Fast Track	62
Oliver Lehman (75Qs)	72
PM Study (Free Test)	84.5
Simplilearn	79.5
PM Perfect	90
Exam Central	90.5
Tech faq	90.5
PM Success	85
PMZilla (200 Qs)	68.5
BrainBOK	88
PMZilla (75 Qs)	64
PM Fast track (Super PMP)	77.5
PMP Exam Simulator	86.67
Kim Heldman	80
Oliver Lehman (175 Qs)	78.86
Pm Study (Paid Test 4)	85
Rita Chapter End Qs	94.31
PMP Exam Prep - PMI	89.49

- Visited prometric centre, one week before exam date. Just made sure that appointment is confirmed, get acquainted with location, had a familiarity with exam centre and environment. This helped me a lot on the exam day since I was able to visualize the environment even before I reach the prometric centre.
- ❖ Closing.
 - Finished all studies and revisions two days before the exam.
 - Just referred Rajesh Nair's notes quickly on previous day.
 - Went through PM Docs, essential comparisons, ITTO mind maps.
 - Took rest in the afternoon session.
 - Went to bed early at night but couldn't sleep well since I had cold and cough.
- ❖ Exam Day.
 - Exam was scheduled at 8AM. Reached prometric centre 45 minutes before the exam.
 - I felt more relaxed since everything looked familiar to me including staff and environment since I had visited the centre before.
 - Prometric staffs were very much supportive. They explained the exam centre rules to us.
 - There was a security check and I was asked to keep all my belongings in the locker.
 - Then prometric staff handed over a small scribbling pad (6 pages) and pencils and guided me to the workstation.
- ❖ Exam Experience
 - I finished brain dump in 10 minutes.
 - I went through the tutorial for 4 minutes and last one minute spent for prayer.
 - Exam was neither too difficult nor too easy.

- I had lot of EV questions approximately around 15-20 Qs. Most of them required calculations and bit tricky. So I had to spend more time than I was expecting for these questions. But my brain dump helped me for this.
- Few questions on project selection methods including calculations.
- Other areas include Conflict Management, Change Management, Configuration Management, Quality (lot of questions) especially quality tools, Risk (be familiar with contents of risk register), HR Theory, Contract life cycle.
- Few questions on ITTOs directly and indirectly.
- Few questions on network diagram.
- Length of questions and exam software was almost same as PM Study exam.
- Exam difficulty was 10-15% more than PM Study.
- Questions are framed in a different way than mock exams. But mock exams can help you to understand the pattern of questions.
- I finished exam in 3 hours 20 minutes with around 30 Qs marked for review out of which 5-6 Qs I have highlighted for sure review.
- Initially my plan was to complete 200 Qs in 3 hours and to take a 5 minutes break after that. But since it took more time than expected, I decided not to take a break. Practice exams helped me a lot in this situation, since I tried 2 practice tests without any break. But it is really difficult to keep your concentration on for four hours continuously. After 170 Qs I was feeling little untidy but managed to keep my nerves under control.
- Then reviewed those 5-6 Qs which were marked for sure review. Then started reading the other review questions. At this stage I felt I am getting little confused about the answers. So I decided not to review all the marked questions and went back to those 5-6 questions and made sure they are correct.
- Now with 5 minutes left for the exam to finish, I prayed to GOD for one minute and just informed the prometric staff that I am through with the exam. He came to me and asked to press the End button. There was a little pause and then survey started. I completed the survey and again pressed the End button. This time my heart was bumping with anxiety. I was 80% sure that I will pass the exam but still.....
- Now the results came with CONGRATULATIONS. I wanted to jump and celebrate my success but controlled myself. Prometric staff congratulated me and handed over the results of exam with prometric stamp on it.
- I came out of the exam centre and informed my wife, family members, my manager and all my friends about the success.

❖ Summary.

- Prepare a PLAN and stick to that plan.
- Finalize the exam date ASAP and mark it as your targeted end date (constraint).
- Inform all your friends and get commitment from your family members so that they don't disturb you during the study time. Especially make sure you get commitment from your wife and kids (if you are married) and make sure that they are informed about what they will get in return (as Rita mentioned in her book) once you complete the certification (benefits like outings, shopping etc.).
- Decide the study materials in advance and stick to that materials only. You may get suggestions from many different sources but stick to your PLAN.
- Prepare a check list and keep monitor your progress against that.
- Read PMBOK guide as many times as you can and be sure that you know all the 42 processes Knowledge Area wise and Process group wise.

- PM Prepcast can help you much during preparation. Make sure that you listen to Risk, Quality and HR episodes at least twice and also listen to Cross cutting technologies and Interviews.
- At the end of you study you should be able to recollect 42 processes in any order.
- Try to understand ITTOs rather than memorization (waste of time).
- Keep yourself motivated all the time and keep your confidence level at high.
- You can use a countdown timer on your mobile so that you know how many days' left for the exam and it just works as a reminder.
- Refer Lessons learned in PM forums. When you see someone passed the exam tell yourself that you will be the next one.
- Take down notes frequently and when you feel that you didn't understand something try to explore that area using internet. Prepare mind maps if it helps.
- Start thinking like a PMP before certification itself. Try to follow code of ethics at your workplace and in your life.
- Attend as many mock exams as possible and review right and wrong answers.
- I have attended around 3700 mock questions.
- Finally have a determination and approach the exam positively.

Let me conclude these lessons learned with a quote by A.P.J. Abdul Kalam (former Indian President)

“The dream is Not What You See in Sleep,
Dream is the Thing Which Does Not Let You Sleep”

Thanks to all...

Regards,

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