

Preventing Project *Failure*

> *What if you could plan for the success of a project by planning for its failure?*

You've heard of a post-mortem: an examination of a dead body to determine the cause of death. It's useful, but it always arrives too late to help the patient.

A pre-mortem is simply the opposite.

It finds the cause of death before anything ever reaches that point. Instead of examining a body, you examine a project, while there's still time to change its outcome.

Research on "prospective hindsight" found that imagining an event has already happened improves our ability to identify its causes by about 30%. Gary Klein brought the idea to business leaders in HBR in 2007.

Here's how it works. Before you launch your next project, plan a pre-mortem meeting.

Tell your team to imagine the project has failed, and that you're now doing an autopsy to understand what killed it.

Give everyone a few quiet minutes to write down every reason they can think of, then share them one at a time. Concerns people hesitated to raise now sound like contributions.

Finally, turn what you hear into your plan. Build safeguards against the top few risks now, and give the project its best chance to succeed.

Naming the possible causes of failure before they can happen is what helps ensure success and safeguards against problems ahead of time.

At Boaz Strategic, we develop leaders who prevent failure before it begins.

Sources: Klein, Harvard Business Review (2007); Mitchell, Russo & Pennington (1989)