Another phone call. Another change on your thorniest project. You roll your eyes, thinking, "How did I get stuck with this mess?"

The never-ending project.

The never-ending project sneaks up on you. Over time, you've made so many changes that it seems normal that in your team meeting, you're changing direction yet again. The sponsor is excited to get their new vision created. You're just tired.

How do you finish the never-ending project?

A change request

When you started the project, you and your team agreed upon the scope of the project. You should have also agreed to the objectives. If you didn't - that's another blog post.

Remind your sponsor of your earlier agreement. Point out how the new request is put through the change process (you do have one?) and you'll let them know quickly what the changes mean to your finish dates and deliverables.

Treat the request like any other change request. Any time extensions are validated, approved, and incorporated into the schedule.

Projects end

If your management isn't well-versed in project management process or techniques, they may confuse projects with operations.

Operations activities are those tasks that are done periodically to keep the lights on and doors open of the business. Projects are one-off groups of tasks that end in a one-time deliverable.

You may have to explain the difference. Projects end. Operations responsibilities never end.

When a manager comes to you and says, "Just throw this in with the other development effort project. It won't take long," resist.

Asking for additional features or completely different functionality of a project team causes confusion and delay.

Offer to help the manager find a project manager for their latest brainstorm. Don't accept a new project on top of the old.

Close out the current project

If you have a manager who insists that the project is changed to meet new criteria, offer to close the current project and open a new one. Good technique requires that each project has good requirements, defined scope, and a team that can support the deliverables. Jumping into the middle of a project and deciding it should change dramatically is a recipe for disaster.

Some managers won't like this - but some will agree. Each project needs its own framework. Don't mix and match projects.

Phase the project

Every organization has an attention span. Produce deliverables every two weeks or so to show progress. In fact, this is similar to how Agile works if it's done right.

When you get a request to dramatically alter your current effort, schedule the new request as a future phase of the project. Finish the current effort and move on to the next one.

In order to finish the never-ending project, recommit to the original scope and objectives. If those are no longer applicable, close out the project and start a new effort. Don't keep adding on to a project that should be moving to completion.

How do you handle projects that have become never-ending? Let us know on the Facebook page.