If it has a staple through it, or a paperclip around it - they won't read it

Many years ago, I was teaching an executive MBA course in project management. Every other weekend, the class would meet and two of the students had to prepare (to the best of their ability) an executive-level status report on an existing project. In the first class meeting, two of the students volunteered to “get the pain out of the way” and be first to team up and prepare a status report for the next class meeting.

In the next class meeting, they handed out a 15-page status report to each student. I then followed them around the classroom, picked up all of the status reports, and disposed of them in the trash can while the whole class watched. The two students that prepared the reports were quite upset. I then told them to prepare another report for the next class meeting and, if the report had in it a staple or paper clip, I would dispose of it in the same way.

The moral to the story is clear: Executives do not have time to read what’s on their desk already, so why give them too much information in which case they will either refuse to read it or study it with a microscope and find a fault. Executives want the answers to two questions: Where are we today? And where will we end up? Do you really believe this cannot be accomplished on a single sheet of paper? The One-Page Project Manager series of books are encouraging you to do just that. Making this part of your Project Management Methodology will simplify and improve your project communication, especially with busy executives.

—Harold D. Kerzner, PhD

Senior Executive Director International Institute for Learning, Inc.

Clark Campbell, Founder & Author

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