

November 5-11, 2004

## ‘Worry curve’ leads straight to goals accomplished

**By Melanie A. Levs**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

When Ken Gwinner, senior vice president of planning, architecture and construction for Turner Properties Inc., was overseeing the expansion of the Omni Hotel downtown, he and his team handed owners Turner Broadcasting System Inc. and Omni almost three months of extra profit. The project was supposed to be completed in January 2004. Instead, it was done in November 2003 and \$1.5 million under budget.

In the summer of 2003, Gwinner said, he also was able to inform the hotel that the project was ahead of schedule, which offered plenty of time to market the new opening and book rooms.

“Being early on the hotel was a huge win,” Gwinner recalled. “That was pure profit — nobody had anticipated that revenue.”

**“A lot of energy is put into the front end to develop that schedule. You’re doing the project mentally before you do it physically.”**

**Ken Gwinner**  
Turner Properties Inc.

How did it happen? Gwinner attributes the accomplishment — and, in the past seven years since he has been at Turner, the more than 800 projects on time and under budget worth \$1 billion — to the Project Success Method. It was developed by Dennis Young, president and CEO of **Young, Clark & Associates Inc.** in Atlanta, from a 1950s Harvard Business Review article he studied in business school

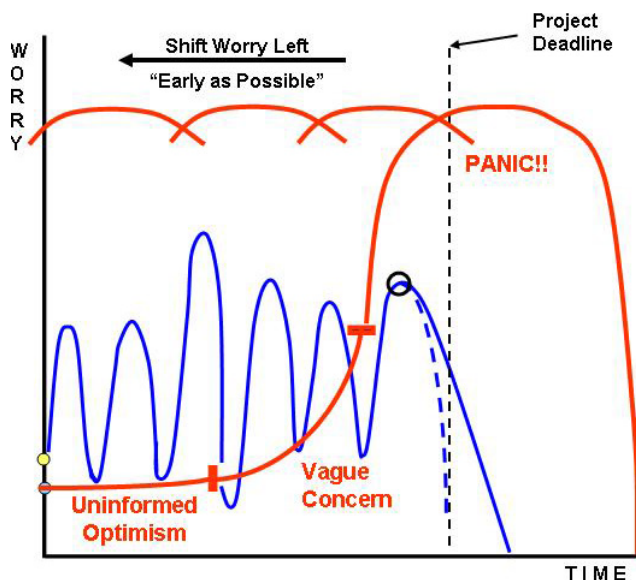


SPECIAL

**Serenity’s reward:** Turner Properties’ Ken Gwinner uses the Project Success Method, which encourages breaking large projects into smaller pieces with earlier deadlines, thereby cutting out last-minute outbreaks of panic.

### Anatomy of the worry curve

Think of it as a sort of Procrastinators Anonymous



Team members break a project down into a series of deadlines, spreading out the creative tension (or worry) earlier in the project for optimum performance.

in the 1970s. The base technique is called the Critical Plan Method, a step-by-step process that allows teams to plan and control projects of various sizes and scopes.

"It enhances teamwork and provides an interactive tool to make business decisions," said Young, adding that DuPont created the Critical Plan Method in the 1950s. "It forces accountability because you identify problems in advance."

Gwinner learned of Project Success 10 years ago while at The Coca-Cola Co. planning Olympics projects.

"I slept well at night," Gwinner said. "The anxiety that often came with incredible details that come with projects dissipated for me. It really changed my perspective on what I do."

He brought the methodology to Turner with him in 1997 and made sure the entire staff of about 55 people was trained in the process.

How does it work? Every project starts with a charter signed by all parties — including architects, contractors, owners and project managers — detailing the nature of the project and its goals.

From the charter comes the project schedule, which includes the Critical Plan Method. Hundreds of yellow sticky notes link each task, including the person responsible and the length of time to complete it. One of the paths, the one that links the most tasks, is the critical path — the tasks that must be done on time for the project to succeed.

"A lot of energy is put into the front end to develop that schedule," Gwinner said, adding it takes two hours to two days to create, depending on the scope of the project. "You're doing the project mentally before you do it physically."

To stay on that critical path, the team meets weekly or biweekly. That keeps communication open and helps identify problems early, said Jeff Cross, executive



SPECIAL

**Micro and macro:** Turner Properties' expansion of the Omni Hotel at CNN Center was finished two months early, \$1.5 million under budget.



**Young**  
Young, Clark  
& Associates Inc.

vice president at Skanska, which works frequently with Turner on projects such as the Omni.

"It makes sure we're all focused on the right component of the project at the right time," he said, adding the method helped Skanska coordinate with vendors and subcontractors so they, too, could plan accordingly. "Without it, there'd be total disorganization."

Those weekly meetings are crucial, said Paul Little, vice president and general manager for Turner Construction Co. in Atlanta (which is not affiliated with Turner Broadcasting or Turner Properties).

"If one of us has a problem, we all have a problem," said Little, whose company recently was the construction manager on the new Time Warner Building in New York. (Little's team hired the subcontractors and bought the materials.) "If the designer is having a challenge, we all have to worry about it because it impacts all of our lives. There's no blame — it's, 'How are we going to help each other solve the problem?'"

That's where the worry curve comes in, Young said. During the first half of a project, worry levels are low because time seems

abundant. That's the "uninformed optimism" level.

"People say, 'I still have a lot of time left — I work much better under pressure,'" he said.

As the deadline looms, the level rises to "vague concern." The final phase is panic, which lasts until the project is completed — often late and over budget, Young said.

The Project Success Method pushes the worry curve and "forces your teammates to worry, which is against human nature," he added. Instead of a big deliverable at the end of the project, this method includes small deliverables every few weeks, thereby creating smaller worry curves and more completed tasks.

For Gwinner, learning this method 10 years ago means that curve stays small.

"The worry curve gets the worrying out of the way early in the project, not when it's too late to do something about it and all you can do is throw money at it," he said.

The Project Success Method has been a personal success as well, he added.

"It really changed my life."