



Is a Deadline Flexible?

Recently, I was asked by one of my bigger clients to work with a group of new media graduates on a project.

I sat in on the briefing sessions and as usual made copious notes to make sure I didn't miss anything, even though we were all told a briefing document would be provided. But I noticed not one of the new graduates made any notes at all.

The whole project had a fairly short deadline and as I was walking back to the office that had been allocated, my mind was already starting to swing into organising mode.

I'm never deterred by short deadlines, it just means working smarter to ensure everything is planned, researched, prepared, reviewed and signed off.

I called a mini meeting of the graduates and asked them to work together for about an hour and come up with a draft timeline and schedule that would meet the project deadline.

In the meantime, I worked alone and produced by own timeline and schedule.

At the end of the hour, we compared our draft documents, albeit they needed more information.

All the graduates looked quite worried and before we could get down to business I was asked...

How flexible is the deadline?

In my head I could hear my tutor saying, deadlines are set in concrete, they're not flexible so don't even think about asking for an extension.

This made me wonder what the graduates had been taught in their studies, and how did they manage to get enough pass marks to receive their qualifications.

I spent the rest of the afternoon passing on my knowledge about managing projects and why deadlines are not flexible.

The best tips I could give them were:

- Make a list of all the tasks that had to be done to complete the project and then work backwards from the deadline date
- Make appointments with anyone who was required to review the material, and
- Factor in a few days between the finished draft and the review to allow for any problems with the allocated reviewer.

I've been living with deadlines for more than 20 years and one thing I know for sure is, if you start to panic your project structure will fall apart. Take a deep breath or three and keep to your timeline and the deadline will be met.

About the Author:

Barb has been a successful business writer/editor/communicator since 1989. She writes in plain language and believes material for print and the web should be clear, concise and user-friendly. Please visit her website at www.barbclews.com to find out more.