# Dismount the dead horse

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Are you having to deal with or manage a "dead horse" project that upper management continues to fund? Is it not working and only sucking money out of the organization? Are you concerned you'll be the scapegoat should the dead horse project fully wither away?

A dead horse project can certainly be quite frustrating to manage or salvage. Before you throw in the towel on it, though, be sure you've considered many possibilities from various angles. Since management keeps funding the project, it's very possible that they would also fund an outside expert to come in and provide an additional analysis of the situation. If you can get such authorization, I recommend you press forward wih it.

If the consultant draws the same conclusion as you, then your opinion on the matter can be validated to upper management, paving the way for a greater chance of the useless project being axed. However, though, in the process of letting a consultant run their screen, they just might find a heartbeat in the horse that you missed. If that happens, don't let your pride or ego get in the way and do what you can to save the horse. But let's make something clear: if the horse is dead, the horse is dead!

Your dilemma with a dead horse project is not uncommon. I've seen many ways people rationalize to keep the dead horse around. For humor's sake, take a look at "The Top Ten Strategies for Dealing with a Dead Horse" compiled by leadership expert John Maxwell:

1. Buy a stronger whip.
2. Change riders.
3. Appoint a committee to study the horse.
4. Appoint a team to revive the horse.
5. Send out a memo declaring the horse isn't really dead.
6. Hire an expensive consultant to find "the real problem."
7. Harness several dead horses together for increased speed and efficiency.
8. Rewrite the standard definition of *live horse*.
9. Declare the horse to be better, faster, and cheaper when dead.
10. Promote the dead horse to a supervisory position.

Although some of these strategies are humorous, I've seen every one of them enacted in the work place at one time or another, and all of them avoid the obvious: the horse is dead and can't be revived. As John Maxwell iterates, there's only one way to deal with a dead horse: dismount!

If you're unable to dismount due to upper management's stubborn desire to continue riding the dead horse despite your suggestion to bury it, then you are obligated to manage it accordingly and do what you can to keep your people's morale at a decent level. Don't complain about it. Don't become careless. Don't sabotage it.

If, despite your best efforts, the dead horse project eventually gets axed and organizational leaders are looking for a scapegoat with fingers pointed at you, then you should appropriately defend yourself to the powers to be. Be ready to show accurate records of all of your communication efforts about the status of the project. (Make copies of important emails or other electronic documents so they don't magically "disappear" from your organization's server.)

Hopefully, though, you work at a place where trust and integrity are highly regarded. Hopefully, you work for great leaders who trust your expertise when making major decisions. Hopefully, when you indicate a horse is dead, your judgment on the matter is honored and you can move on to a more important live horse.

~ The End ~