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SUMMER 2015

The Practitioner: Malachi Walker



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Malachi Walker has been up for 16 hours, but it's impossible to detect any signs of fatigue as he shares wit and wisdom with his small class of future project managers on a chilly spring evening. "Don't make me pull out my phone and look at last week's wedding photos."

His gentle threat gets a laugh from his students, because they know he's really telling them to grab his attention when they make their final presentations later in the week.

A full-time project manager by day, Walker is teaching one of the last courses students need to receive their project management certificate through USD's Professional and Continuing Education program, which has catered to working professionals for more than 40 years.

Many of his students have day jobs, are the same age he is (or older), and

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have taken other courses with him, so it makes for a collegial vibe in the room in the Manchester Conference Center. But while Walker is easy-going and soft-spoken, he's no pushover, as he illustrates in a war story from his own experience.

He tells the class about a project he was working on, where he had announced to the client six weeks earlier that he was going away on a particular weekend. Then, right before Walker was leaving, he was asked to process a lot of small tasks that would have put him way behind. He said no.

"A lot of people will ask, 'Can you make a small change to this? Can you take time to do that?'" Walker says. "But all of their little changes can put you in a situation that makes it seem like you're not on top of what you're doing."

Walker knows what he's talking about. An instructor at USD since 2013, he has more than 12 years of experience in the field. He works as a technical project manager for the San Diego Tourism Authority, supports a biotech start-up as a project research and development specialist, and owns a fitness training business.

During one of the many lively class discussions on scope, cost and scheduling, Walker cautions his students: "Sometimes we get so focused on clearing the big hurdles that we trip over a pebble before ever reaching the hurdle."

Those pebbles might include using the wrong technology when something simpler might do, or paying attention only to feedback from executives rather than listening to the worker bees. Walker loves the challenge of teaching and the confidence the university has in him to step into any environment, whether in the classroom or online.

"It keeps me sharp. It forces me to think on my feet." One key trait of a good project manager is the ability to cope with constant setbacks. Walker wants to teach that to his students. "You have to be very resilient," he says. "You have to practice patience with yourself. There are so many things that pop up where you can make a mountain out of a molehill." — Bonnie Nicholls

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