Lindsay Peterson stopped by my office on Halloween day to discuss her project to consolidate worldwide sales data for the Sales Department. I hardly recognized her when she stepped into my office. She was wearing a white jumpsuit, with big gold glasses and a fake wig. Mega Manufacturing encouraged its employees to come dressed in costumes for Halloween, and Lindsay's was one of the best—a female Elvis!

"Boy, it's tough to imagine the teenagers swooning over you," I joked as she came in and sat down.

"Very funny, Tom. Tell me, who exactly are you suppose to be?"

I was wearing a regular suit and tie, but had an old reporter's hat on, with glasses and an exaggerated parting in my hair. I stood up to provide a clearer clue as to my costume. I had purposely left the middle buttons on my dress shirt undone, and I pulled them aside to show Lindsay my blue T-shirt with a large "S" printed on it.

"Ah, Clark Kent. Very clever."

"What do you mean," I said in a deadpan voice. "I was just going to say that I am not wearing a costume today. Now tell me 'King,' what's got you in Heartbreak Hotel on your project?"

"Tom, you know we recently came up with a workaround to replace some Web reporting software that would not work with our browser," Lindsay started. "Well, we are behind schedule. I wanted to get some tips from you on things we can do that might help."

"Have you tried anything so far?" I asked.

"We have assigned a couple of new part-time people to the project," Lindsay noted. "But they are not having much effect. At this point, we will probably end up missing our deadline. However, I want to prepare a new workplan and I want to see how close we can get to the original date."
“Okay,” I agreed, standing up to write on the whiteboard. “First, let’s verify that your new part-time resources are working on the right activities. Then let’s list out a number of techniques that will help to accelerate the schedule.”

LESSON 43
BE PROACTIVE IN APPLYING TECHNIQUES TO ACCELERATE THE PROJECT SCHEDULE

The project manager starts off a project with a workplan. However, it seems projects never behave exactly as planned, and soon you need to make adjustments. Some activities end late and new ones are needed you didn’t account for. If you are lucky, you have some activities completing early as well, and you have some built-in contingency to help absorb inaccurate estimates. However, if you are unlucky (this seems to be the case more often than not), you end up in a situation where you start trending over your deadline.

The first responsibility of the project manager is to understand the work remaining so you can catch this problem as early as possible. If you find you are trending four weeks behind schedule, for instance, it is better to understand that with six months to go rather than with two months to go. The earlier you recognize the problem, the more flexibility you have to resolve the situation.

After you realize you are trending past your deadline, you must also try to understand the cause(s). If you do not understand the cause of the problem, you may put a plan into place that fails because the problem continues to occur. Regardless of how you get there, you are obliged to get back on schedule if at all possible. If you cannot meet your committed deadline, you should strive to put together a new realistic estimate. However, you should also strive to complete the work as close to the original deadline as possible.

The following techniques can be applied to the situation. This list is not in order of priority, and some techniques may work better in certain situations, whereas others can be applied more successfully elsewhere. Some of these techniques may require additional funding, but that may be a viable option if the deadline date is more important to the client than the budget.