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projectmanagementglobal.com

Issue 14



Jean Kang

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Breaking Barriers: How Jean Kang is Redefining the Rules for achieving Project Management Career Success

Jean Kang is swiftly becoming one of the most influential voices in project management and personal development. With her straightforward advice rooted in her own journey from sales to program management in the tech industry, Jean offers a wealth of unbiased, practical insights into carving out a successful career in this field.

Based in San Francisco, Jean's impressive resume includes stints at some of the world's most recognizable tech giants. Remarkably, she didn't follow the traditional path of acquiring formal qualifications or spending years climbing the corporate ladder. Instead, Jean embodies a new generation of project and program practitioners who prioritize attitude and aptitude over credentials. Her story is a testament to how strategic career pivots and leveraging technology can catapult today's project practitioners to C-suite positions at record speed.

As I sit down to interview Jean, it's immediately clear why she resonates with so many young professionals. Her warmth and friendliness are matched only by her efficiency. Our meeting was seamlessly arranged through Calendly, her AI assistant joined before she did, and she had already provided thoughtful responses to our preliminary questions. I was already impressed before she even said a word.

Curious about her unconventional path, I ask Jean how she landed a top tech role without formal qualifications. She smiles and downplays the drama, "I would describe myself as an ex-tech program manager turned coach and content creator. My mission is to empower the next generation of PMs." Her determination is palpable.

Gateway to other industry opportunities

Jean has spent over a decade in tech-related project and program management. She initially started in sales, viewing it as a gateway to other industry opportunities. "Sales was the perfect platform for me to develop opportunities," she explains. But her big break came unexpectedly when she was asked to run a large program. "That was my real introduction to the profession."

What Jean loves most about her work is managing a project from start to finish and leading teams to the finish line. "It's impactful, challenging, and fulfilling," she says. Her experience spans both startups and large tech enterprises in the Bay Area. She contrasts the fast-paced, scrappy culture of startups with the slower, red-tape-laden environment of larger organizations. In big tech, she notes, 80% of the effort is managing stakeholders and conflicts, while in startups, the challenge lies in the lack of structure.



When asked where she learned her project management skills, Jean credits on-the-job experience. "Traditional project courses don't prepare you for the constant ambiguity and thinking on the fly that the role demands. It's about building experience and having the courage to try things others might shy away from."

Jean has written extensively about her success in pivots between organizations and how this has boosted her salary, elevated her seniority and developed her network in the process. Her advice for the modern project management recruitment arena? "You don't need all the technical knowledge and terminology to be successful. It's far more important to demonstrate exceptional soft skills. At the interview stage" she encourages, "lead with how you've creatively solved problems in the past. That's what will truly set you apart from other candidates."

Adapting quickly

One of the biggest challenges for project managers according to Jean, is overcoming organizational silos. "As a PM, you need to form collaborative teams, especially in large organizations. Too often you will find a culture where everyone is head-down in their own work. "It is quite different to what you will typically find in startups," Here the challenges are around lack of structure and defined methodologies, instead you need to bring your own processes and adapt quickly."

After a decade as a senior program manager, Jean made the bold move to go independent last year. "I wanted to bet on myself and see what I could achieve if I put all my energy into my coaching side-hustle," she says. With the support of her husband and family, her career has been transformed and she now enjoys a six-figure income, engaging with her thousands of loyal followers across multiple platforms. ▶



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► Despite her success, Jean remains humble. “I’m still getting used to it all,” she admits. “It happened so quickly, but she is resolute in saying. “I know I want to help people to build fulfilling careers. I know that this is where I can have the greatest impact.”

Her approach to growing her online community is simple: authenticity. “People are drawn to my story and how I integrate tips and support into my narrative. I try to be honest about the realities of the profession, sharing both the positives and negatives.”

Among the most common questions Jean gets is about the difference between project and program management roles. In fact her breakout post on this topic went viral on LinkedIn, putting her on the map. She advises aspiring PMs to gain experience in driving projects, even if it’s through volunteer work or side hustles. “Immerse yourself in free industry content, continuously upskill, and create a personal brand that supports your career vision.”

LinkedIn, she notes, is a game-changer for PM job seekers. “It helps you stay connected with thought leaders across the industry and land opportunities with organizations of all sizes. She recommends that aspiring project managers, join relevant communities and follow industry news. She continues, “It is vital that you hold yourself accountable for your own learning and development. And to be patient and to give yourself the grace to learn. As it doesn’t happen overnight”

Boundless energy

Looking to the future, Jean is excited about the growing demand for project management professionals. Studies predict a 33% growth in the field, with 22 million new jobs over the next five years. “It’s a massive opportunity for anyone joining the industry,” she says.

As our interview draws to a close, Jean shares her imminent plans for the launch her hotly anticipated PM Accelerator program. The five-week bootcamp is designed to help individuals land their next PM role and thrive. She’s also focusing on personal branding and monetization coaching, offering a step-by-step guide based on her journey to 77,000 LinkedIn followers and six-figure income in under a year.

Jean’s energy and enthusiasm are boundless. She represents a new breed of project leaders, ready to take on the world with inclusiveness, positivity, and self-determination. Breathing new life into the profession, sweeping away old assumptions, stuffiness and preconceptions.

Her message is clear: the barriers in project management profession are being broken down, and the future is bright for those willing to forge their own path. 🌟

You can learn more about Jean Kang and sign up for her popular newsletter, Path to PM, through her LinkedIn bio. Jean is the founder and CEO of Path to PM, a LinkedIn Learning Instructor, and recognized as a top LinkedIn Program Management Voice, with experience at top tech companies like LinkedIn, Figma, and Meta.