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Focus

PART 2: PLANNING

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Last week I wrote about using prioritization to help keep focused on high value activities; laying out some techniques that have worked for me to ensure that each week and each day things are getting done effectively and efficiently.

This week I'd like to take a look at the next step in this process - planning. While prioritization is the necessary first step, without developing a plan to work against all those priorities, they will inevitably fall back into the heap. Successful execution against any prioritized list requires that a plan be developed up front, before any work begins.

Over the years I have heard many teams bemoan this part of the process. Do any of these phrases sound familiar?

- Why can't we just start?
- We'd get more done if we didn't waste all this time planning.
- You gave us priorities, let us just go do the work.

The planning process is always met with push-back. Teams

naturally want to dive right in, get after it, and start the work. They are excited to produce, deliver, and bring ideas to reality. Our job is to show them that sometimes, you must go slow to go fast.

By that, I mean we must spend the necessary time up front building a plan for success. Devote the time and effort required for these discussions. Lay out the tasks, dependencies, risks, and milestones to measure against along the way. Taking this action will allow you to see things from a broader perspective and potentially allow you to rearrange activities to ensure you are making progress.

Planning isn't a perfect science by any means. My business partner, a West Point graduate, always likes to say, "No plan survives first contact with the enemy." While we have all seen priority shifts, new requirements, unknown dependencies, and unforeseen events that result in the need to replan an entire sprint, release, or even project; think about how much worse off we'd be if we had no plan in the

first place.

Take, for example, a shift in a dependency or new requirement introduced to a sprint. Often this only requires small plan adjustments to accommodate. Had we not built the plan in the first place; this adjustment could be detrimental to the entire sprint. This flexibility to replan smaller increments of work will save us time and effort in the long run.

Planning is key to keeping the team focused, successful, and transparent. What tactics are you using these days to help your teams plan for success?

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