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As the product owner, my first and foremost goal is to clearly express the items in the product backlog and to order them in a way that will achieve the team’s overall goal and mission. To do this, I must first find what features the users desire in the final product and why they desire these features. Learning about the users on a more personal level will help with that; understanding the user will help me to understand why they want a specific feature, and will thus give that feature more meaning for the Scrum Team. Having open discussions with users can achieve this. Interviewing users is a start, but facilitating an open discussion will tell me more of what I want to learn from them. Giving the users open-ended questions is a good strategy to get dialogue flowing freely amongst the group.

Since the user stories define the product backlog, these stories will give the scrum team incremental steps to work through during product development. More importantly, the user stories will help the team understand “why” they are developing these features. When the team understands why these features are necessary, they have more investment in designing and creating said features. The user stories tell the team what the user wishes to have in the final product, but they do not explain how the team should accomplish this. Therefore, the team has an end-goal in mind, but how they get there is open-ended, giving them a chance to creatively problem solve and potentially find the best solution to the given problem.

The interviews and user meetings are crucial to getting the user stories into the backlog because they give the product owner some insight as to what features the users want most and what features are maybe less-important (but still important overall). In the sample interview, the process was set up as more of a conversational-style, with users discussing with one another as much as with the product owner. This style of interview allows users to “bounce” ideas off of one another, and helps them to expand on other users’ ideas. This open-dialogue helps some users put their ideas into words, or gets them thinking about features they previously hadn’t thought of and then adding to them. For instance in the example the user Brent expanded on Nick and Maria’s idea of having a top-five list of destinations by adding that it would be nice if the destinations were customized based on his previous travel or his user profile. This is a perfect example of how a good idea can be honed down to a more detailed great idea.

References

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