

## Phillip Walker: Part B

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This case was written by Matthew Manley, Professor of Computer Science and Electrical Engineering at Brigham Young University – Idaho. The case is intended to be used as a basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a technical teamwork situation.

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## The Meeting

Ryan leaned forward over the conference table, anticipating Phillip's response.

"No, Ryan, that's a nine-month job," he replied.

Surprised, Ryan looked around at the other development team members, waiting for them to speak up. After all, they had discussed this in the preliminary meeting. He really thought they had all agreed on six months. Everyone was looking somewhere else though. No one said anything.

"Let's break for lunch," said Ryan in a low tone. "Phillip, we need to talk."

## The Manager

Ryan Evans had been a software development manager for several years. He started his career as an information technology consultant with Deloitte and Touche, one of the big four professional services firms. Working his way up, he eventually went on to successfully manage a number of software development projects for different fortune 500 companies, several of whom were in the health care industry. He was known for delivering software on-time and within-budget, or at least mostly so. As far as software development projects go, it was a stellar track record. After a few years, however, the pressure and long hours became too much. Ryan decided to leave the firm and find a less demanding job. After a month of relaxing and recuperating, he settled down to begin his search in earnest. It wasn't long before he landed the position with Mercy Health Group.

Ryan enjoyed his job with Mercy. After a period of consolidation and growth, the conglomerate started to invest heavily in new technology and Ryan was right at the center of it. He and his software development team were responsible for several successful systems during this period including the 3D operating model system. As Mercy's financial situation changed and the *MyCare* project assumed greater importance, Ryan found himself at the center of things again.

Trying to get a head start, Ryan convened a preliminary planning meeting with his development team. Unfortunately, Phillip Walker, his software designer, couldn't attend. He was working on another project at a different hospital that day. Ryan decided to go ahead with the meeting anyway.

"When do you think we can be done?" he asked after explaining the project to everyone.

"We could probably be done in five or six months," replied a junior developer on the team.

"More like eight or nine," replied another, more senior developer.

The discussion continued on. Everyone seemed willing to discuss the likelihood of completing the project but no one really offered a definite time frame. Without Phillip Walker, they simply

weren't willing to commit to a hard deadline. Sensing the conversation had drawn to a close, Ryan turned to the most skeptical developer and asked, "So, can we try for six?"

With some hesitation, the developer replied, "We could try."

"Six months it is," concluded Ryan.

While he was no stranger to high visibility projects it had been some time since Ryan was in charge of one as critical as *MyCare*. He was eager to get the project underway. His sense of urgency grew larger after an encounter with his boss, John Eckert, later the same day.

"So, how long do you think this is going to take?" asked John as he walked toward Ryan.

"*MyCare* is going to take a lot of work. I'd guess" he didn't get a chance to complete his sentence.

John interrupted as though Ryan hadn't spoken at all. "You know we're all counting on this. If we don't roll out this year we're finished. When will you complete it?"

Ryan recalled his conversation with the development team. "Six months." he replied.

John nodded satisfactorily and continued on his way. Ryan watched him for a few seconds before turning his mind to the next planning meeting. He would need to invite all of the stakeholders like marketing, administration, and of course, Phillip Walker. He missed his opinion earlier that day. It was time to get started!

## **The Talk**

With Ryan's last words, everyone got up and left the conference room for a lunch break. Soon, Ryan and Phillip were the only ones who remained. Ryan took a deep breath and turned to Phillip.

"The company only has six months," he said.

"It doesn't matter. We can't agree to that," argued Phillip.

"We already have," replied Ryan.

Phillip furrowed his brows before responding, "Ok, look, I'll get with the team and create a new estimate. I'm telling you though, we need nine months at least."

"The board of directors expects *MyCare* in six," Ryan countered.

"That's not going to happen," Phillip stated firmly.

They both stared at each other, considering what to say next. Ryan continued.

“There has to be a way to reduce the time. Can we work smarter?” he asked.

“We know what we’re doing. We already work smarter,” replied Phillip.

“You need to work overtime,” stated Ryan.

“That’s not true. The guys just work slower and burn out quicker,” Phillip replied.

“We’ll figure something out,” stated Ryan.

Phillip was getting frustrated. “No, we won’t. We can get some of it done in six months but there will be a lot of missing features. That’s just how it is.”

“Ok, but you’ve worked miracles before. You could do it again if you’d just try,” responded Ryan. “I’m not sure where this is all coming from. You’ve always been a team player.”

Ryan felt more frustrated than when they started. Ryan had managed lots of software development projects and six months didn’t seem unreasonable. On the other hand, he usually relied on Phillip’s expertise in this area. So, how long was this project really going to take? Six months, nine months, or something in between? He needed a different approach to find a way forward. What could he have said differently?