Chapter 9: Time Management Strategies

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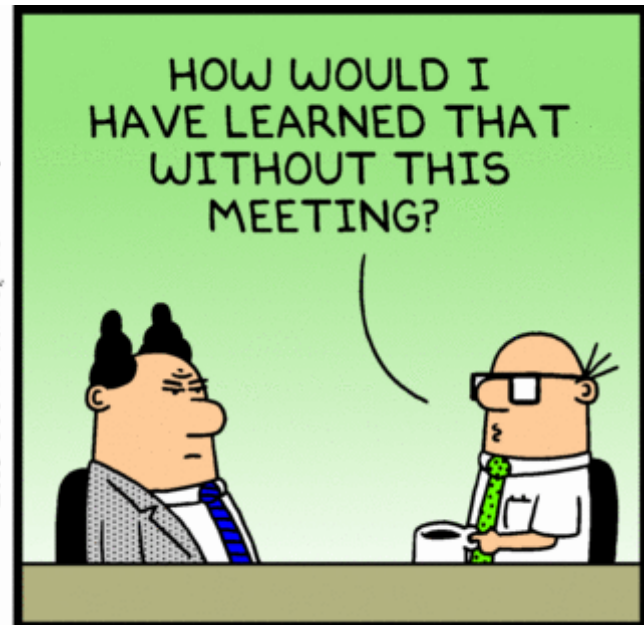# Meetings

- $200 per hour per attendee
- Truths about meetings:
  1. Meetings are necessary
  2. Meetings are huge time wasters

Declining Meetings

- Be careful about which meetings you attend and which you politely refuse
- Only you can manage your time
  - Only accept meetings you plan to attend and participation is immediately and significantly necessary to the job you are doing right now
  - Your responsibility to your projects first
  - Discuss participation with your manager
- Duties of a manager is to keep you out of meetings

When the staff meeting could have been just an email

Leaving a Meeting

- When the meeting gets boring, leave
- If you find yourself stuck in a meeting that is not a good use of your time, you need to find a way to politely exit that meeting
- Remaining in a meeting that has become a waste of time for you, and to which you can no longer significantly contribute, is unprofessional

Having a Meeting Agenda and a Goal

- Need the participants together in a room to help achieve a specific goal

- Meeting should have a clear agenda, with times for each topic and a stated goal

- If you can't get a clear answer on an agenda or goal, then politely decline to attend

- Agenda has been high-jacked or abandoned, you should request that the new topic be tabled and the agenda be followed

Stand-up Meetings

1. What did I do yesterday?
2. What am I going to do today?
3. What's in my way?

- Each question should require no more than twenty seconds, so each participant should require no more than one minute.

Iteration Planning Meetings

- Most difficult meetings in the Agile canon to do well
- Iteration planning meetings are meant to select the backlog items that will be executed in the next iteration
  - Estimates should already be done for the candidate items.
  - Assessment of business value should already be done.
  - In really good organizations the acceptance/component tests will already be written or at least sketched out.
- The meeting should proceed quickly with each candidate backlog item being briefly discussed and then either selected or rejected.
- My rule of thumb is that the meeting should take no more than 5% of the total time in the iteration.

Iteration Retrospective and Demo Meetings

- Conducted at the end of each iteration
  - Team members discuss what went wrong and what went right
  - Stakeholders see a demo of the newly working features
- Schedule 45 minutes before quitting time on the last day of the iteration

SPRINT RETROSPECTIVES

OK guys, Darth choking developers in sprint reviews is something we really need to fix stat!

Arguments/Disagreements in Meetings

- Any argument that can't be settled in 5 minutes can't be settled by arguing
  - Each party has all kinds of justifications for their position but seldom any data
  - Force of character – get in your face, or act condescending
  - Data settles arguments
- Passive-aggressive – agree to just end the argument
  - Sabotage the result by refusing to engage in the solution
  - If you agree, then you must engage
- Data that is needed to end an argument
  - Run experiments or do simulation or modeling
  - Flip a coin

Arguments/Disagreements in Meetings Cont.

- Pick a path
  - Things work out then you choose the right path
  - If you get into trouble, you have an alternative path to go down
  - Agree to a time and criteria to help determine when the chosen path should be abandoned
- Beware of meetings that are a venue to vent a disagreement and to gather support for one side or the other
  - If an argument must be settled, present both sides of the case in five minutes or less and have the team vote

Focus-Manna

- Focus is a scarce resource
  - After you have extended your focus, you have to recharge by doing unfocused activities for an hour or more
- Professional developers learn to manage their time to take advantage of their focus-manna
  - We write code when our focus-manna is high
  - We do other, less productive things when it's not
- Don't use it, you lose it – meetings can be devastating
- Worry and distractions also consume focus-manna

Focus-Manna Cont.

- Sleep
  - Seven hours of sleep will often give you a full eight hours' worth of focus-manna
- Caffeine
  - A really strong caffeine buzz can cause you to waste an entire day hyper-focus on all the wrong things.
- Recharging
  - Partially recharged by de-focusing
  - Good long walk, conversation with friends, a time of just looking out a window, meditate, power nap, listen to a podcast, etc

Focus-Manna Cont.

- Muscle Focus
  - Regular regimen of muscle focus increases my capacity for mental focus
- Input vs. Output
  - Writing software is a creative exercise

Time Boxing and Tomatoes

- How many can you get done in a day?

- Measure your weekly tomato velocity

Avoidance

- Sometimes your heart just isn't in your work
- Priority Inversion
  - You convince yourself that something else is more urgent, and you do that instead
  - Preparing for the lie we'll tell when someone asks us what we are doing and why we are doing it.
  - Clearly this is unprofessional behavior. Professionals evaluate the priority of each task, disregarding their personal fears and desires, and execute those tasks in priority order.

Blind Alleys

- Sometimes you will make a decision and wander down a technical pathway that leads to nowhere.

- Prudence and experience will help you avoid certain blind alleys, but you'll never avoid them all.

- The Rule of Holes: When you are in one, stop digging.

Marshes, Bogs, Swamps, and other Messes

- Messes slow you down, but don't stop you.

- Messes impede your progress, but you can still make progress through sheer brute force.

- Messes are worse than blind alleys because you can always see the way forward, and it always looks shorter than the way back (but it isn't).

Progression of a Mess

Chapter 9: Key Points

- Software professionals are
    - Diligent in the management of their time and their focus
    - Understand the temptations of priority inversion and fight it as a matter of honor
    - Keep their options open by keeping an open mind about alternate solutions
    - never become so vested in a solution that they can't abandon it
    - Always on the lookout for growing messes, and they clean them as soon as they are recognized.
- There is no sadder sight than a team of software developers fruitlessly slogging through an ever-deepening bog.