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Perfecting versus perfection

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Accept a progressive refinement attitude with a “confidence percentage strategy”.



We've all heard the groan: “We have an aggressive schedule to meet.” The fact is, it's not the “schedule” timeline that is aggressive; rather, it's what we choose to fit into it.

In an earlier article, I noted that we cannot know with 100 percent certainty that any decision is correct because it's implemented in the future. By accepting that time changes our environment and sometimes even our purpose, we also need to accept progressive refinement. The concept is to define a very conservative stance in the early inception of the project schedule. Commit to only a conservative few (3-5) MUST HAVE features and provide a “best effort” on the rest of the (Nice to Have) feature sets. And as time progresses, and we learn more, we refine our estimates and schedules accordingly. This allows us to change our energies from complaints about “an aggressive schedule” to a realistic but aggressive best-effort feature list.¹

Progressive refinement isn't delaying a decision on the schedule. We're actually making a series of decisions, consistently reviewing and refining throughout the project.

I am also not condoning excessive padding. Instead, you should incorporate a reasonably sized stabilization period between each of the project's critical paths and bottlenecks and institute a confidence percentage (e.g., “We are 70 percent certain that...”) as part of your schedule assessment and review criteria.

Oftentimes we feel pressure to sign up to a schedule and commit too early in the development phase. The schedule might look fine as far as you know today, so you can't exactly state that you disagree with it. It's just that you don't know what you're really committing to. Incorporating the confidence percentage strategy allows you to comfortably agree and also illustrates your areas of concern.

For instance, at the start of a “next generation version 1 product” — your confidence on your original schedule and level of estimate might be only 40 percent. This means that you are only 40 percent confident in your estimates, and that your estimates may be as much as 60 percent off. Share with your teammates that confidence level, the action items, timeline, and plan you will use to increase you

¹ The MUST HAVE and Nice to Have method allows us to drop any of the Nice to Have items and redirect resources to assure the MUST HAVES are accomplished. At the end of the project, we have accomplished our published MUST HAVES and even a handful of the Nice to Haves (going above expectations).

confidence level to 80 percent. Include what you don't know — i.e., the activities, owners, and deadlines you will be using to close that gap — in your schedule assessment.

Additional tip:

Don't give a "confidence percentage" without a plan of action to close the gap between where you are and where you want to be regarding your confidence level.

Providing the plan for how you will be closing this gap is essential in increasing THIER confidence in your ability to manage your project, team and the inevitable unforeseen events of longer projects.

Let me know if these tips help at all.

1.

About the Author



[Laura Rose](#)

Laura is a certified business and personal life coach, specializing in time management skills, project management training and work/life balance strategies. She has been in the software and testing industry for over 20 years. She's worked with such companies as IBM, Ericsson, Staples, Fidelity Investments and Sogeti in various client advocacy and project management roles. The techniques she uses in her business coaching and client advocacy work saved these companies both time and money, which resulted in on-time, quality product delivery with higher client satisfaction. Laura now uses her client focus, project, quality and people management skills in her personal life coaching career. As a personal life coach, she helps people integrate their goals and dreams into their everyday lives. Laura uses creative and practical tools to help her clients realize what really matters to them. They then follow-through with project and time management techniques to create the reality they really want. Laura authors many articles and workshops on time management and strategic scheduling. She is also the founder of the electronic magazine the Rose Garden: the Art of Becoming. Laura offers one-on-one career and life coaching, small group coaching, seminars and workshops. You can learn more about her at www.RoseCoaching.info and contact her at LauraRose@RoseCoaching.info Contact her for a free 30 minute coaching session at your convenience.