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Run A Sprint Planning Meeting Like A Boss (+ Meeting Agenda)

By Alexa Huston | 05/02/2019 | One Comment

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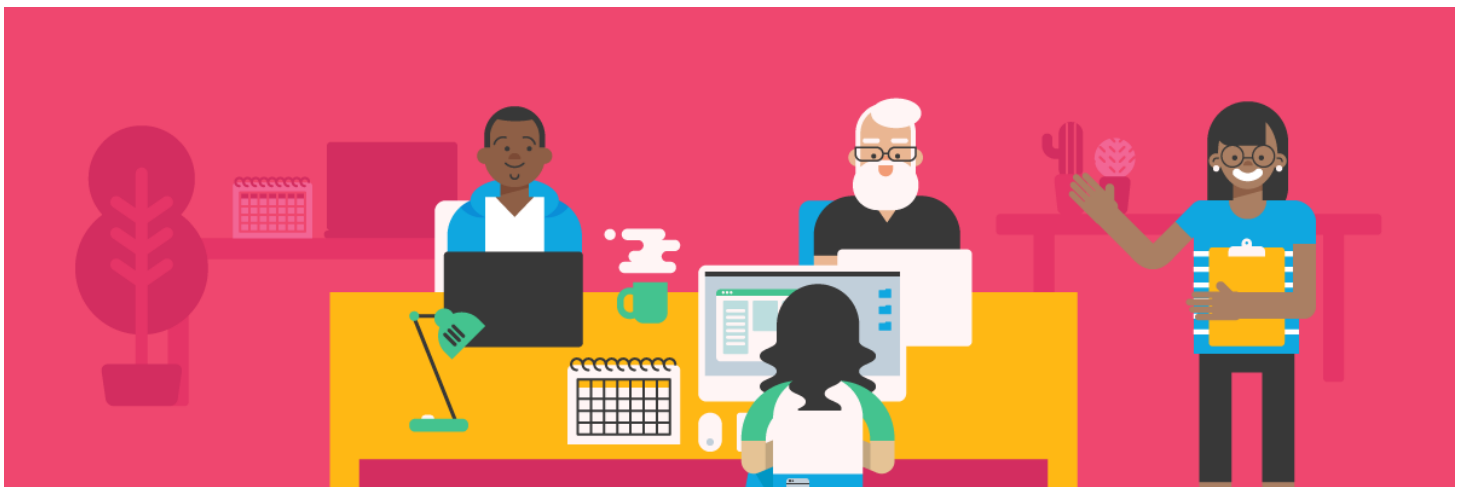
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In this article, I am going to unpack this particular meeting and offer up some helpful tips to make your next agile sprint planning meeting more efficient, effective, and less dreadful.



After going through this, you will be armed with more information to make a bigger impact in less time at the next sprint planning meeting that you run. Let's dive in.

What Is A Sprint Planning Meeting?

A sprint planning meeting is one of the [Scrum ceremonies](#) widely adopted by teams who utilize sprints to mark when work “begins” and “ends.” It is designed to answer the questions, *What can be delivered in this next sprint? And how will we accomplish that work?*

To put it simply, the sprint planning meeting should provide structure, set expectations, and define the [backlog](#) for the upcoming sprint.

There are several people involved in these meetings, and it is a very collaborative effort. Let's break down what each role does.

Recommended Reading:

- [DPM Podcast: How To Plan An Agile Sprint \(With Alexa Huston\)](#)
- [Scrum Ceremonies, Made Stunningly Simple](#)



PRODUCT OWNER

Represents the client and the business in general for the product on which they're working.



SCRUM MASTER

Responsible for ensuring the team has everything they need to deliver value.



DEVELOPMENT TEAM

A group of cross-functional team members all focused on the delivery of working software.

The 3 scrum roles: product owner, scrum master, development team

The ScrumMaster

The ScrumMaster facilitates the sprint planning meeting and ensures that meeting rooms are booked, supplies are available, people are prepared, and all video conferencing and other connectivity details are ready to go. In terms of scheduling, the ScrumMaster should be

The Development Team

Obviously, the people doing the work will need to be in the sprint planning meeting. Designers, developers, test engineers—anyone who will contribute to the work product—needs to be in attendance and actively participate in this meeting so that they can walk away with a solid understanding of what's expected of them and what is priority to work on over the next sprint.

Keep in mind that teams get better at sprint planning with time. If a team is newly formed (or new to agile), there may not be as much shared understanding on how much can get done within each sprint. Later, [we'll talk about calculating velocity](#). Just keep in mind that mature teams tend to do better at this. There's an element of constant improvement with agile, so give yourself some grace if your first sprint planning meeting did not go as well as you had hoped!

Why Should You Run A Sprint Planning Meeting?

Why run a sprint planning meeting? Because it is a great opportunity to get the whole team

- Task sign Up
- Task prioritization
- Task estimation
- Knowledge and skill set improvement
- Different perspectives
- Promotes Just In Time (JIT) planning

Below, we'll talk about just a few of the biggest benefits of sprint planning meetings.

1. Brings Definition To Your Goals

If you are a ScrumMaster (or similar DPM role) on a team that is delivering development work and utilizing [agile methodologies](#), you should be running a sprint planning meeting. These meetings help set your team up for success because it allows everyone to understand exactly what the goal is for each sprint of work.

You'll define two major things during sprint planning:

during the sprint. It also includes all the necessary tasks required to deliver the work. Each task should also be [estimated](#). The great team at Mountain Goat Software has a video course on scrum foundations & explains how the [sprint backlog](#) ought to come together during sprint planning.

It's easy for sprints to go off the rails without a shared understanding of what should be accomplished. The sprint planning meeting is your means to an end to get there.

2. Brings Alignment And Buy-In From Your Team

Keep in mind that it is a collaborative, team effort to arrive at the outputs you'll have by the end of a sprint planning meeting. The team decides how much gets done during a sprint, not an overpowering Product Owner or an outside stakeholder. Your team members gain a sense of empowerment by taking charge of their flow of work. They also benefit from better alignment with others by having the time to talk about how their work will fit together over the next sprint.

3. Provides A Reference Point For Measuring Velocity

Moving forward, the scrum team would know that, on average, they complete 30 story points per sprint and could use this as a guide when going through the backlog items in sprint planning. As mentioned above, the team decides what they want to bite off each sprint, so if they want to shoot for 40 story points, and everyone agrees, the sprint backlog could add up to more story points than their velocity. The inverse could also be true.

Velocity will ebb and flow over time, but a mature agile team's velocity will start to trend upward as they get more and more used to working together and on the product. Velocity is a key number for the Product Owner to keep in mind as they work to figure out how many sprints it will take to release the next version of the product.

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HOW DO YOU RUN A SPIN PLANNING Meeting?

Here is a visual aid to illustrate how this meeting should go:

HOW TO RUN AN Agile Sprint Planning Meeting

PREPARATION



- ✓ ORGANIZE YOUR BACKLOG
- ✓ MEASURE USER STORIES
- ✓ CHECK YOUR TEAM'S SCHEDULE
- ✓ ESTABLISH YOUR VELOCITY
- ✓ GAUGE YOUR CAPACITY
- ✓ CREATE & SHARE A MEETING AGENDA



MEETING



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listed, and all descriptions are set. Without this prep work, the sprint planning meeting is less efficient and more time-consuming for everyone.

Measure user stories

The Product Owner, with the help of the team, also needs to ensure that each user story is the [right size](#), not too large or small, to be thoughtfully considered during sprint planning. The team will have a better idea of this the longer they work together.

Examine the team's commitment

Take a look at the calendar for everyone's availability. Are there holidays coming up? Will your lead dev be out on vacation? Have a good idea of how much time people will be available over the next sprint.

Establish your velocity, or how you'll measure it

This is unique to every team. If you have an average amount of work that's typically completed in each sprint, use that as your measuring stick of how much can get done while planning the sprint. If you're working to establish this for a newly formed team, be sure to track how many



Sprint Planning Meeting Agenda

Before Sprint Planning Meeting

- Backlog Prep:** The Product Owner must ensure that all items in the backlog are properly groomed - properly written with complete user stories, acceptance criteria, prioritized, and with dependencies identified, and test cases defined.
- Measure user stories:** The Product Owner, with the help of the team, also needs to ensure that each user story is the right size, and ensure it shouldn't be split into additional user stories.
- Examine the team's commitment:** Take a look at the calendar for everyone's availability. Check how dedicated your team is to the project. **If it's not** fully dedicated, could they get pulled away to work on other things?
- Establish your velocity, or how you'll measure it:** Use your average amount of work that's typically completed in each sprint as a guide of how much can get done in the next sprint.

At Sprint Planning Meeting

Review

- Aspirations, goals, or visions for the project.*



Sprint Planning Meeting Agenda Template

Enter your Name and E-mail address below to download a copy of our Sprint Planning Meeting Agenda template for free.

Assuming all of that is taken care of, you are ready to dive into your sprint planning meeting!

During The Sprint Planning Meeting

[Leading Agile](#) has a great sprint planning meeting agenda for the sprint planning process. We dive into a bit more detail and show you what the steps look like:

Remind the team of the big picture or goal

It's critical to set the stage for the team and the meeting itself by articulating aspirations, goals, or visions for the project. Everyone is working hard for a reason.

Discuss any new information that may impact the plan

Chances are, the ScrumMaster, Product Owner, or other team member has received updates from outside stakeholders since the last time the team planned a sprint. It's important to review any new information from the market or customers that help to set context for what the upcoming sprint will look like.

The team likely has feedback on things they've run into when completing the past sprint. These could be reasons why they couldn't complete some stories or a new update that threw a wrench in the plan. Stuff happens! Be sure to address these with the team at large.

Review the definition of DONE and make any appropriate updates based on technology, skill, or team member changes since the last sprint

The only way someone knows if something is complete is if there is a clear description of what "done" means. Give the team what they need to grade their completion! Also, team members may have been moved around or added since the last sprint. Address this and make changes accordingly.

Present product backlog items to consider for the sprint backlog

Now the team can review the proposed backlog. These were prepared by the Product Owner and organized by value. It should be roughly the size of *two* sprint's worth of work, just in case the team has questions about how this work will relate to future work.

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If anything else came up during sprint planning that wasn't already on the radar, find a space to record those and identify action items.

Confirm any assumptions or dependencies discovered during planning and record

Similarly, the ScrumMaster should be noting any other related impacts that may arise from the sprint plan getting put together. This could have a result on a later sprint.

ScrumMaster calls for a group consensus on the plan

Once the [sprint backlog](#) has been identified, the ScrumMaster asks the whole group if they are aligned on the plan. Review it against your current velocity and capacity. Review it against the overall product vision. Ask every person if they're comfortable with it.

Team and Product Owner signal if this is the best plan they can make given what they know right now

Hopefully, everyone is aligned and feels confident they can deliver that chunk of work based on what they know today. Inevitably, things will change, but if the team feels confident in



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arsenal. If you're still asking yourself if your team is ready for one of these, keep in mind that you should run a sprint planning meeting if you have a backlog of work, are a part of an [agile team](#) that is dedicated to building a product, and are already utilizing some agile processes to get the work done.

I'm curious to know if anyone else has tips up their sleeve to make the sprint planning meeting even better! Leave a comment below and let's learn from one another.

Alexa Huston

Alexa Huston is a former project manager at Crema, now working as a Business Development Strategist. Crema is a technology and innovation agency that partners with funded startup, small business and enterprise clients to prototype, test, and build their web and mobile applications. When she's not at their KC office, she can be found at the gym working on getting stronger, in the kitchen whipping up something delicious, or drumming up plans for upcoming travel.



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