Extracted from:

Manage It!

Your Guide to Modern, Pragmatic Project Management

Manage It!

Your Guide to Modern, Pragmatic Project Management

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Foreword

Hello, and welcome to Johanna's latest book. I'm currently a director at Yahoo! (in Berkeley) and have been in the software business for several decades. In fact, you might have heard of Digital Equipment Corporation (the foundation of the early Internet) and its Alpha system. That was a very important project for me.

I played a major role in the delivery of the Alpha software. It was a monumental task: some 2,000 engineers scattered all over the world, all working on various parts of the system. It required rigorous planning and project management, and we delivered on a four-year schedule within one month of our target date. So, as you can imagine, I thought I was a pretty good manager! But I was about to find out what an *excellent* manager is like.

In May 1996, I decided to leave DEC, and I heard about a job opening at another major software company in the Boston area. It was just the kind of challenge I relish, director of a product group—"a team living in chaos." Great, I thought. This is what I do! Coax the potential out of the chaos, and help deliver an actual working product. Now where's my white horse?

I heard that a consultant had been brought in to "triage" the development of the group's beta release. This only strengthened my conviction that they would soon find the hero they had been waiting for—in me.

But, wow! Instead, I was instantly (and progressively more and more) humbled and impressed. I understand what consultants are supposed to do. . . but when do they actually articulate situations in practical and actionable ways? This consultant had done just that. And in just a couple of months, she had managed to get all the pieces in place: a project charter, a program plan, and project plans, as well as defined roles and responsibilities, a defined development process, pertinent metrics, release criteria, beta customers. . . all the elements that are critical for a project to succeed.

But all that usually takes significant time to put in place—especially when starting from a deficit position. Yet here they were! You've probably guessed by now that this consultant was Johanna Rothman. (Johanna has a case study about our joint adventure on her website—only the names have been changed to protect the guilty!)

Over the years since I first met Johanna, I've run software development organizations in companies large and small. And on numerous occasions, I've engaged Johanna's services to help move my team to the next level. Her assessment process is rigorous and provides the solid footing that's required for effective project management. She tailors effective workshops on a multitude of topics—for me, she has done iterative project requirements, project management, and QA. I have hired her for interim management positions and for one-on-one coaching for people with varied skill sets. Johanna draws on a broad range of experience in a diversity of situations and organizations, and she always manages to provide solutions that are practical and realistic—solutions that can actually be implemented to solve key problems.

And so, this book is a real gift from Johanna.

She pulls knowledge from all her years on the front lines and presents the material in a cohesive way. The book provides you with the tools you need to analyze your own situation, build a framework and rational plan, and then execute. Johanna gives you lots of tips and examples of what works and what doesn't—and advice on how to avoid the rat holes. Even after years of project and program management experience, I learned new things when reviewing this book. And when I'm in a new or challenging situation or when I need a sounding board to help me think through a tough problem, Johanna is the one I call.

Oh, yeah—that project we worked on when I first met Johanna? We shipped the product to the beta customers, and it worked!

I know Johanna's book will help you succeed as well.

Ellen R. Salisbury (Director, Yahoo! Research Berkeley)
April 2007

Preface

You've been bombarded with a ton of techniques, practices, and unsolicited pieces of advice about how to manage projects. All of them are saying "Look at me, I'm right."

Well, many of them are right—under certain conditions. Since each project is unique, you will need to evaluate your context (the project, the project team, and the business in which you're working) and then make pragmatic choices about what will work and what won't.

Every day your projects become faster-paced, your customers grow more impatient, and there is less and less tolerance for products that don't work. What worked before might have been good enough to get you here, but the chances that it will work in the future are not good. You must take advantage of all practices and techniques to reduce your project's risk, including considering agile techniques for every project.

This book is a risk-based guide to making good decisions about how to plan and guide your projects. It will help software project managers, team members, and software managers succeed. Much of the information also applies if you are building more tangible products, such as a house or a circuit board, or if you are managing a service project.

I'm assuming you're managing a high-tech project, with at least some software component. You might have had some of the same project management experiences as I have: lots of software projects and some hardware/software combination projects. I've also managed a few service projects, such as planning and holding conferences. I've been part of some construction projects (one new house, one small remodel, and one large remodel). But the bulk of my experience is with software or software/hardware projects in some form.

It's harder to manage software projects than it is to manage projects that have a tangible deliverable. Software is ephemeral—not concrete, not material, not created out of substance—so we can't touch it, we

can't directly measure it, and we can't see it. It's harder to see the product unfold, and it's harder to see and anticipate the risks—so it's much harder to deal with risks. The way we practice software product development does not always help us see where the project is or where it's heading.

When you manage tangible-product projects, you can see the product take shape. You can see the shell of the building, the finish on the walls, and all the steps in between. With service products with a tangible result, such as a conference or meeting, you can gain some insight into the project if there are interim deliverables, such as rough-draft reports or run-throughs of meetings. Both tangible-product projects and some service projects allow you to see project progress before the end of the project.

So, what do you do when you can't directly see project progress? What do you do when you suspect the project smells funny, and you think it might be headed toward disaster? How do you deal with stakeholders who don't want to make the decisions that will help you create a successful project?

This book is about providing insight into your software projects and managing the risks that arise from within the project as well as the risks with which you start your projects. From chartering to release, each chapter discusses ways you can see inside your software project, measure it, feel it, taste it, and smell it.

One thing you won't find in this book is the One True Way to manage projects. There is no One True Way that works for all projects. You also won't find best practices. I'll suggest helpful practices for each life cycle that might help you and the project team achieve your goals.

You'll notice that there are forward and backward references in this book. That's because a project is a nonlinear system. Your early decisions for your current project have implications for how you'll finish this one—and possibly how you'll start the next one. How you manage projects might affect the way you can manage the product backlog or project portfolio.

All the templates in this book are also online, at the book's home page, http://pragmaticprogrammer.com/titles/jrpm.

I thank all the people who helped me write and edit this book: Tom Ayerst, Jim Bullock, Brian Burke, Piers Cawley, Shanti Chilukuri, Esther Derby, Michael F. Dwyer, Mark Druy, Jenn Greene, Payson Hall, Peter Harris, George Hawthorne, Ron Jeffries, Bil Kleb, Michael Lee, Hal Macomber, Rob McGurrin, Andrew McKinlay, Erik Petersen, Dwayne Phillips, Frederick Ros, Ellen Salisbury, George Stepanek, Andrew Wagner, and Jim Ward. My editor, Daniel Steinberg, provided exceptionally helpful feedback. Kim Wimpsett was again a copyeditor *par excellence*. I thank Steve Peter for his typesetting wizardry. Mark Tatro of Rotate Graphics developed all the schedule game cartoons. Working with Andy Hunt and Dave Thomas was, once again, my pleasure. Any mistakes are mine.

The stories I'm telling are all true—the names, companies, and specifics have all been changed to protect the innocent and the guilty.

Let's start.

Johanna Rothman
April 2007

A Pragmatic Career

Welcome to the Pragmatic Community. We hope you've enjoyed this title.

If you've enjoyed this book by Johanna Rothman, and want to advance your management career, you'll be interested in seeing what happens *Behind Closed Doors*. And see how you can lead you team to success by using *Agile Retrospectives*.

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You can learn to be a better manager—even a great manager—with this guide. You'll find powerful tips covering:

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Behind Closed Doors Secrets of Great Management
Johanna Rothman and Esther Derby
(192 pages) ISBN: 0-9766940-2-6. $24.95
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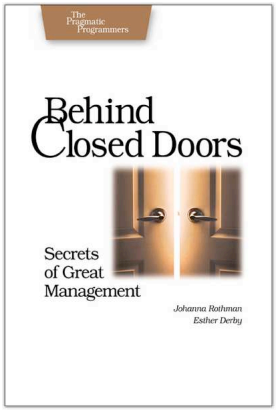

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Mine the experience of your software development team continually throughout the life of the project. Rather than waiting until the end of the project—as with a traditional retrospective, when it's too late to help—agile retrospectives help you adjust to change *today*.

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Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great
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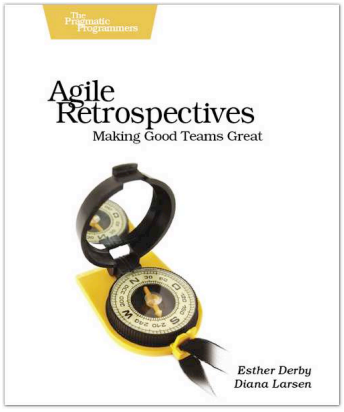

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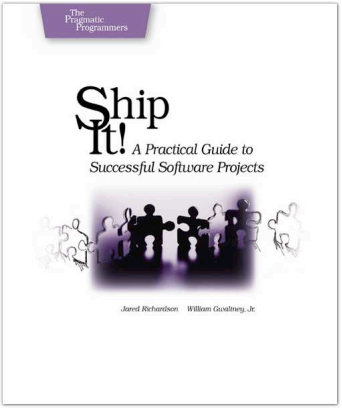

Ship It! A Practical Guide to Successful Software Projects
Jared Richardson and Will Gwaltney
(200 pages) ISBN: 0-9745140-4-7. $29.95
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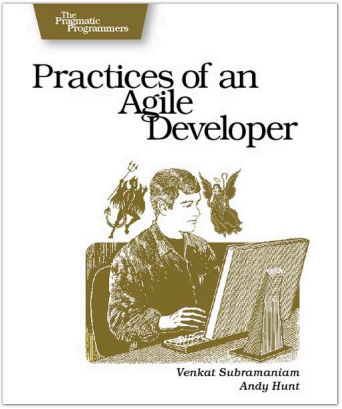
Agility is all about using feedback to respond to change. Learn how to apply the principles of agility throughout the software development process • Establish and maintain an agile working environment • Deliver what users really want • Use personal agile techniques for better coding and debugging • Use effective collaborative techniques for better teamwork • Move to an agile approach



Practices of an Agile Developer: Working in the Real World
Venkat Subramaniam and Andy Hunt
(189 pages) ISBN: 0-9745140-8-X. $29.95
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Cutting Edge

Now that you've finished your project, are you sure that it's ready for the real world? Are you truly ready to *Release It!* in this crazy world?

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Release It!

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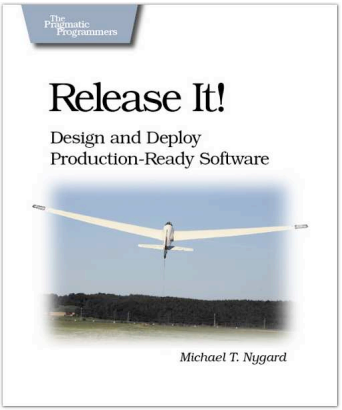
If you're a developer and don't want to be on call at 3AM for the rest of your life, this book will help.



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Michael T. Nygard
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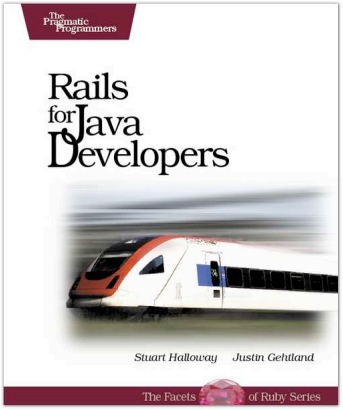

Rails for Java Developers
Stuart Halloway and Justin Gehtland
(300 pages) ISBN: 0-9776166-9-X. $34.95
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Facets of Ruby Series

If you're serious about Ruby, you need the definitive reference to the language. The Pickaxe: *Programming Ruby: The Pragmatic Programmer's Guide, Second Edition*. This is *the* definitive guide for all Ruby programmers. And you'll need a good text editor, too. On the Mac, we recommend TextMate.

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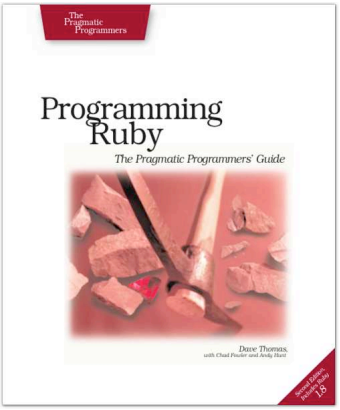

Programming Ruby: The Pragmatic Programmer's Guide, 2nd Edition
Dave Thomas with Chad Fowler and Andy Hunt
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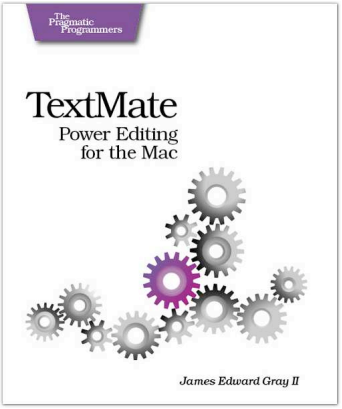
TextMate

If you're coding Ruby or Rails on a Mac, then you owe it to yourself to get the TextMate editor. And, once you're using TextMate, you owe it to yourself to pick up this book. It's packed with information which will help you automate all your editing tasks, saving you time to concentrate on the important stuff. Use snippets to insert boilerplate code and refactorings to move stuff around. Learn how to write your own extensions to customize it to the way you work.



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