

Chapter 3

Taming the Resistance

Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising which tempt you to believe that your critics are right.

To map out a course of action and follow it to the end, requires some of the same courage which a soldier needs.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

XP forces people out of their comfort zones. They will resist. This resistance comes from fear and pride. Overcome this by focusing on using XP as a strategy to increase their chances of winning.

If you think your own fear and ignorance are the only obstacles you'll face when starting XP, think again. That is just the beginning.

Other people will resist. They can't afford not to. They have a good bit of time, effort, and ego invested in the way things have always been done. Change might be risky, painful, or both. It also might cast doubt on their past judgment. You are pushing them out of their comfort zone, and they won't like it.

You'll get resistance from two primary sources: from managers and developers. If you are a manager, you might face resistance from the developers you manage, from your management peers, or from a manager above you. If you're a developer, you might face resistance from your manager or from the developers you work with. You probably won't be shot—beyond that, all bets are off. We've seen everything from reasonable and open debate to screaming matches and sabotage. It can get ugly.

The most likely form of resistance will be simple objections that XP is wrong, stupid, or inferior for one reason or another. These objections are supposed to be based on principle, but most of the time they aren't.

Where Resistance Comes From

Managers and developers are people. We human beings are wired to fear the unknown and to think we are worth more than we are. If you don't believe this, you haven't been paying attention. Unfortunately, both of these natural behaviors can cause problems.

When we are afraid, we gravitate toward ways of thinking and acting that make us feel safe, even if they are unhealthy or unproductive. New ways of doing things can be scary, so people tend to slip back into old ways of doing things. This inertia is natural.

New approaches can be challenging in two ways. First, they force us to admit that there was at least one thing we didn't know (the new technique). Second, they force us to admit that our current approach might be wrong. Our pride makes it difficult to do either one.

Nobody likes to be ignorant or wrong, because that wounds our pride. Rather than risk that, we often resist new ways of doing things. That lets us stay comfortable. Unfortunately, admitting ignorance and mistakes is the only way to learn new approaches. It's rare to be an expert at a new technique when you start—mastery requires practice. It's also rare to find that there is no better way of doing things—there is *always* room for improvement.

Managers and developers alike often fall victim to pride. Both are frequently afraid of change and unwilling to admit that they have something to learn. This is at the core of a lot of the resistance you'll face from these groups. Not all the resistance you run into will be this simple, and it might not surface entirely in the beginning. You have to be ready to handle it at any time. Fortunately there is a simple strategy that seems to work most of the time: Focus on results.

The Result That Matters

In 1968, a lanky guy named Dick Fosbury revolutionized the sport of high jumping with a technique that became known as the "Fosbury flop." Instead of going face-first over the bar and scissor-kicking his legs like everybody else, he flopped over on his back and landed on his shoulders. It looked stupid, frankly. Lots of people said, "We've never done things this way" and "That'll never work." But at the 1968 Olympic games, Fosbury cleared every height up to 7'3¼" without a miss. He won the gold and set a new Olympic record. It is hard to knock the winner for using an unorthodox strategy.

XP is an unorthodox strategy for producing great software that delivers high business value on time, without forcing people to give up their lives. When you face resistance from managers and developers, remind them of this. Each

group will have their own particular objections, which we'll talk about in the next couple of chapters, but they all want to "win" as they define it. If doing something new and different, like XP, will increase your chances of winning, then that's the smart thing to do. If you can't get people to agree that winning is the goal, it might be time to change jobs. Losing is a hard habit to break.

If you can get everyone to agree that winning is what's important, cast XP with each group as the best way to do that. Focus on the results XP produces that can help managers and developers win as they define it. This not only will focus attention on what's really important, but will also give you a standard to use when evaluating each practice against other options.

Approach every discussion by asking whether doing things the old way will make winning more likely. Make the strongest possible case for the old way. Talk about what it's missing. Then introduce the possibility that using the XP approach might be best, even if it goes against the gut reaction of most people. Finally, work hard to convince people that the best way to prove whether XP produces better results is to try it for a while.

If XP produces better results sooner and with less pain than the old way, it will be tough for managers and developers to say the team should go with the old way, just because it's familiar. If they do, you might want to consider leaving the organization.

What Not to Do

Managers and developers will object to particular practices. You will be tempted to defend them, or your support of them, on theoretical grounds. Don't. These things are irrelevant. Instead, discuss the objection in the context of winning. Remember that winning is the goal, not the individual practices *per se*, or being right. The practices are simply ways to help you win. They are not "good" or "bad"—they are only better or worse than the available alternatives.

The reality is that you will have to justify and defend XP practices eventually. If everyone involved agrees that getting results is the goal, you have a ready-made standard for evaluating XP practices against other options. If a practice increases your chances of getting results, do it. If it doesn't, scrap it or change it so that it does work in your environment.

Finally, don't focus on XP for the sake of XP. This will label you a zealot in a nonproductive religious war. Remember that getting results is the goal, not XP or you being right.

In Chapters 4 and 5 we discuss how to handle manager and developer resistance in more detail.

