Getting a Project Back on Schedule

Just because you monitor your project on an ongoing basis does not mean that you will never miss deadlines. The good thing about managing the workplan is that you will know very quickly if you are trending over the end date. This will give you an opportunity to put a proactive plan in place to get back on schedule. A project trending over its deadline is always caused by the critical path trending over its deadline. There is not a simple process that will do the trick in every case. However, there are some techniques you can apply to get the job done.

- **Reallocate resources onto the critical path**. First determine what work is on the critical path of the project. Then see if there are resources that can be moved from other activities to help with the work on the critical path. This will allow you to get the project back on track by delaying or stretching out some work that can safely be delayed. Be careful though - delaying some work may end up changing the critical path.

- **Schedule overtime work**. Determine whether team members can work (more) overtime to make up the shortfall. This may have cost and morale consequences, but may allow you to get the project back on schedule. If you look at this option, it is best that the overtime not be excessive or for too long a timeframe.

- **Swap resources**. Ask whether the project delay is caused by a team member(s) who is less productive than others, or who do not have the right skill set. There may be opportunities to replace resources, or swap them within a project team so that a more productive resource works on the activities that are behind schedule.

- **Improve processes**. There may be delays caused by inefficient internal processes. The project manager should solicit team member feedback and look for ways that are within your team's internal control to streamline processes. If there are delays caused by external processes, try to negotiate changes to the processes on a going forward, or at least a temporary basis.

- **"Crash" the Schedule** - Crashing the schedule means to apply additional resources to the critical path, in a way that minimizes the incremental costs. For instance, if one person were assigned to complete an activity in ten days, would two people be able to complete it earlier - perhaps not in five days, but earlier than ten days? The additional resources may come from within the project team, or they may be loaned temporarily from outside the team. Note that one of the goals is to minimize the incremental cost. However, in exchange for completing some work ahead of schedule, crashing usually always leads to some additional incremental cost to the project.

- **Fast Track** - This involves looking at activities that are normally done in sequence and assigning them totally or partially in parallel. For instance, a concrete foundation normally cannot be laid until the wooden frames are up. However, as a part of fast tracking, you can ask whether the concrete can be poured on one side of the foundation while the other half is still being framed. If so, then parts of these two activities can be done in parallel. Note that this technique can accelerate the schedule, but it almost always leads to more rework in subsequent activities, as all the details of the preceding activity become known to the succeeding activity. Therefore, there are almost always some incremental costs to the project.

- **"Zero Tolerance" scope change**. Work with the customer and team members to ensure that absolutely no unplanned work is being requested or worked on, even if it is just one hour. All energy should go into accelerating the original work that was agreed to.

- **Regain commitments**. Work with team members to evaluate future work, re-validate estimates, and gain commitments to complete work on schedule. Refocus the team on meeting deadlines.

- **Improve morale**. Build shared purpose, increase camaraderie, do some fun things. The team will work harder and perform better if they do not spend time complaining and sulking. Get people excited and happy again.

- **Scope back work**. If the completion date is firm (timeboxed) and you cannot get the remaining work completed by the deadline date, and then raise the situation as an issue. If no other options are found, work with the customer to reduce the scope and deliver less by the due date. This will first require issues management, and then scope change management. Update the **Project Definition**, if necessary, and replan the project based on the new remaining workload.