



PSP Addicts Anonymous

Hello. My name is David Webb, and I am a PSPSM addict.

PSP is the acronym for Personal Software ProcessSM, developed by Watts Humphrey. It is a software engineering discipline that trains software professionals to plan, track, and improve themselves like marathon runners. I am addicted to it. Let me give you some examples of my addiction.

I plan everything. Note, everything! I plan my days, each and every day, in great detail. I identify every meeting I'm to attend, every document I'm to produce, and all the activities I'm to perform. I estimate the relative size of each event (from very small to very large). I assign a time value to each of the tasks based upon my historical data for the type of task and its relative size. (A medium-sized meeting, for example, is typically 60 minutes long.) Then, I put the tasks in order and create an earned value tracking plan for my day. As I work the tasks, I record the actual time in minutes it took me to complete each one. Every time I do this, I update my actual earned value and compare it to my plan. I then adjust my plan throughout the day to account for unexpected events.

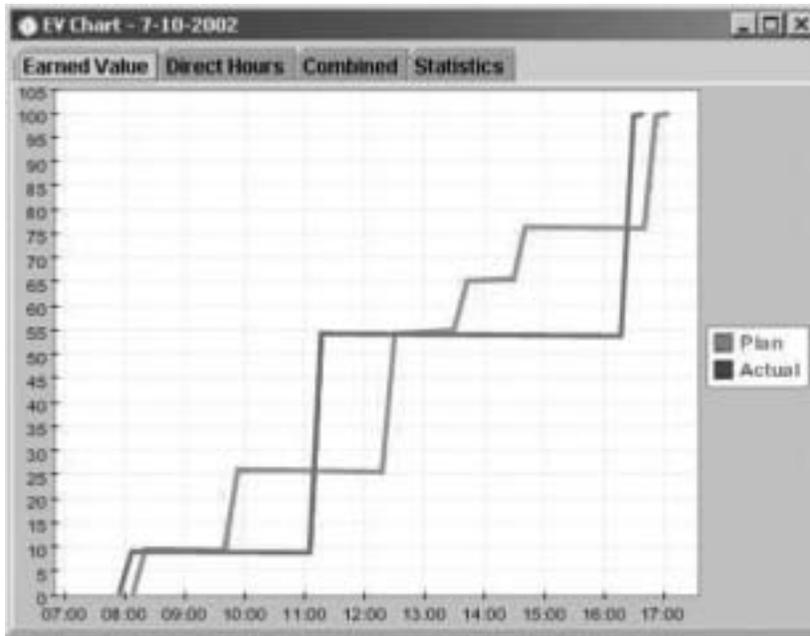
At the end of the day, I conduct a post-mortem to record my historical data, compare my estimates to my actual times, document any lessons learned, and prepare the tracking form for the next day.

Impressed? Scared, maybe? Wait, there's more!

Another symptom of my addiction is that I have a documented process for everything. Of course, I have a process for creating software and for planning and tracking my day, but I also have a process for conducting meetings, writing meeting minutes and documents, updating project metrics, and all the routine things I do throughout the week. I even have a process for balancing my checkbook.

Oh, yes. This addiction extends to my home life as well. My family has gotten

used to seeing charts on the wall. Weight loss and family budget charts are the most common, but I'm currently working on a weekly earned value chart for household chores and another to track savings toward our summer vacation. I have to hide these charts in the bathroom where most visitors won't see them. (PSP addicts are not well understood by nonbelievers.)



David Webb's Daily Earned Value Chart

Which brings me to this question: Why do folks take an instant and extreme disliking to those three little letters? PSP addicts often suffer from open hostility. For example, people have stormed out of my PSP classes (Did I mention I'm also an instructor?), started shouting matches over it, and have even called me a liar. Last month, a well-respected software professional called the PSP practice of tracking to the minute "#*%@-ing ludicrous!" He then spent several minutes telling me why it was ludicrous and why the use of the expletive was the kindest possible way to put it.

I think a major reason people dislike it is that PSP is threatening to their way of life. Outside of the sports world, people generally do not like measuring themselves. (When was the last time you really looked at the bathroom scale?) A basic assumption of PSP is that we must measure ourselves. Another PSP tenet is that current methods for producing software are not only inadequate, they are danger-

ous. This does not sit well with people who have been working that way for a couple of decades. PSP is also a direct departure from the prevalent hack-and-slash culture and treats the creation of software not as an art form, but as a discipline.

PSP requires us to be marathon runners, to know the length of the track we're running and to use a stopwatch to time ourselves. Some people feel that this takes the fun out of coding. PSP addicts find the fun in meeting a schedule and producing code that compiles and tests perfectly the first time. This attitude actually scares some people.

So, what do we do with weirdos like me who actually like PSP? (Oh, yes, there are others!) Do we really want to set up a booth at COMDEX to collect donations to eradicate this debilitating and unpleasant disease?

You know, there are advantages to working with PSP addicts: They give you accurate estimates, they let you know early on if those estimates need adjusting, they know their strengths, they know their weaknesses, and they know how to improve themselves. While it may seem that the overhead of PSP data collection will slow you down, PSP has been proven time and again to actually increase productivity.

So, rather than find a cure for PSP addicts, maybe we should send them to support groups. These groups already exist and, where properly implemented, are effective outlets for the PSP addict: Team Software ProcessSM (TSPSM) groups. These are teams of PSP addicts who work together to produce nearly defect-free code on time and under budget. And just like other support groups, TSP groups have weekly meetings. It's a good thing, too - finally we have someone to show our charts to!

— David R. Webb
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