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What are you most proud of professionally and why? What did you learn from that experience? (400 words)

“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.” – Anais Nin

Six months ago, I was hired by the Department of Justice (DOJ) to lead a team of fourteen software developers, who were only delivering 70% of their projects on-time. The client was frustrated – and questioned the productivity of the team.

Within a few months, I discovered why the team was missing deadlines: mid-cycle requests from the client, one week per cycle spent developing work plans that served no function, and no standard communication around project status. How the team spent its time was a mystery to everyone.

I knew of a tool (TFS) that allowed teams to coordinate projects online. The team saw it as a waste of time – more documentation and less time to work. Furthermore, adopting TFS would force the team to adopt the Agile software delivery process, something they also resisted.

Despite this resistance, I knew that Agile would boost productivity by allowing the team to be flexible in the face of the client’s changing needs. Somewhat new to Agile, I read up on it in the evenings.

In meetings, I tried to highlight the benefits of TFS and Agile. When that fell flat, I interviewed each developer individually about what their pain points were with the current process. I then outlined how TFS and Agile would address those very pain points. Next, we collaboratively decided how we could incorporate parts of TFS and Agile into our process. By the end of three months, we had successfully implemented them both.

I also did away with lengthy work plans. The team now has 25% more time to work on projects each cycle, which has boosted our productivity.

Our client can now see the status of each project task. This prompts him to defer lower priority requests when we’ve hit capacity. Our client now also has a much deeper understanding of our process. TFS has, in effect, helped us regain our client’s trust and confidence.

We are now meeting deadlines, feeling successful and operating more cohesively. My team members feel less pressure, and they are more productive. They are excited about bringing forth their talents each day at work. Each member has become a greater asset to the team, and in turn, the team has become a greater asset to the Department of Justice.