

# 10 Practical Solutions to Overcommitting

by Mike Register

Overcommitting is common practice in many organizations today. The consequences of team overcommitment are no small deal:

- » Lower quality: Teams who overcommit tend not to hit the Definition of Done for each story every sprint.
- » Burnout! Overcommitted teams and individuals have a tendency to go into Hero mode, powering through to deliver at an unscalable and unsustainable pace.
- » Lower productivity: Paradoxically, teams who overcommit actually deliver less, because their focus is compromised. Studies show that multitasking and task-switching heavily affect productivity.



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Here are **ten practical solutions** to help you avoid overcommitting.

## 01 Forecast

Use “yesterday’s weather” (i.e. your team’s average velocity) to sprint plan what you can take on in the coming sprint.

## Manage Your WIP

## 02

Actively manage your team’s work in progress (WIP) during the sprint. For Kanban teams, this is done through WIP limits, but even Scrum teams can put WIP limits on the number of open stories your team is working on at any given moment.

## 03 Focus on Done

Focus on getting stories to done as quickly as possible before starting new stories.

## Swarm

Swarm (or at least pair) on stories to get them done faster.

## 04

## 05 Allow for Slack



Photo courtesy of Wikipedia.

Allow for slack time in your sprint plans. This will better enable your team to handle the unexpected and maximize the flow of delivery. Avoid maximizing utilization at the expense of productivity

## Queue It Up

If you're concerned that your team may not have enough work coming out of sprint planning, then have 1-2 stories in the ready queue to be worked on if in fact the team finishes all the committed work before the sprint ends. You can always pull work into a sprint before it finishes.

## 06

## 07 Keep Stories Small

Keep your stories small. Queuing theory provides evidence that small items flow through delivery systems much faster than large work items.

## Define "Ready"

Make sure your stories are READY to be worked on before sprint planning. This will lead to better understanding of the work, better estimates, better planning overall.

## 08

## 09 Work with True Capacity

Make sure you know everyone's true capacity for the upcoming sprint during sprint planning. Make sure you call out everything that takes time away from capacity, including time off or upcoming events you need to be prepared for.

## Work is Visible

Make sure that all your team's work is identified in planning and is visible during the sprint.

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