



Quardev Monthly

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Welcome!

Welcome to a new year at the Quardev Monthly!

We look forward to sharing insights and helpful information in the areas where we know a thing or two - testing, quality assurance, technical writing and documentation, project management, and consulting.

This month we look at personal organization. Something we continually strive to

streamline our processes and increase our effectiveness.

In this article Jon Bach details the use of a workflow paradigm, called personal Kanban, to help measure and increase productivity.

Enjoy the newsletter with our compliments and please contact us with questions, comments, or article ideas.

-The Quardev Crew!!

Personal Kanban

By Jon Bach, Manager for Corporate Intellect, Quardev, Inc.

Another year, another set of resolutions that don't work?

Maybe there's a lesson to be learned in NOT making another to-do list.

We've found that a simple to-do list is not so simple. First, it's one-dimensional.

Although there is some reward for crossing things off the list, lists often have important tasks mixed with menial tasks; tasks that take no time and tasks that take days; tasks that when finished, create new tasks; tasks that have dependencies on other tasks.

The "simple" list also does not take into account all of the other "human" things that get in the way. Motivation, for example. Something may be on your list, but do you feel like doing it? Then there are interrupt-driven items which you can't foresee on a list. Then there's the issue of having

too many things on the list to begin with. Very quickly, a list becomes the enemy, as if it planned its own obsolescence.

Maybe there's a lesson from the Extreme Programming / Agile / Scrum software development camps on how they organize and track their work:

1. Simplicity: one task written clearly on a post-it note
2. Stages: tasks have the following states: Backlog, In Work, Blocked, Done
3. Visibility: track them on a whiteboard as stages change
4. Time: limit the work-in-progress and do them in short bursts (iterations or sessions)

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Personal Kanban, Continued

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This workflow paradigm is known as a kanban, (Japanese for “signpost”). It comes from a way of visualizing work in Japanese manufacturing circles. It’s an important component of measuring WIP (work-in-progress) and achieving a continuous stream of business value, which is good for morale (and revenue).

We suggest scaling this down to just you.

Jim Benson, CEO of Modus Cooperandi in Seattle, has written a new book on what he calls “Personal Kanban,” with an explanation of the principle and a picture on his website: <http://personalkanban.com/>

“Unlike other personal productivity tools, Personal Kanban is a pattern – it is not an edict. You can mold it into whatever shape or form works best for you at the time. Personal Kanban is also scalable – it can work with just you, or with your family, or even with work groups.”

Now before you go dumping all of your old to-do lists onto post-it notes on a whiteboard, we’ve found the following to be true for us when we experimented with doing as personal kanban:

- Limiting your backlog will limit your work-in-progress. That’s a good thing.
- The “Done” column: some say it’s not necessary, we think it’s a playground for celebration
- Ordering the post-it notes on the board by priority helps when you get distracted.
- Having a board within arm’s reach helps you feel more productive

Now there are computer-based products like ScrumWorks and Kanbantool which are good because of their portability (for taking on air-planes and working at home on snow days), but the important part of the kanban for us was the tactile, kinesthetic nature of moving an item from one column to another. Even the act of creating work items from scratch, brainstorming both the big and little items, we found useful to get the items out of your head and onto the board for processing.

It’s meant to be a little factory in front of you, in three dimensions, living and adapting as you do in your day. Given, this, it sure makes the one-dimensional to-do list seem like the Ghost of New Year’s Past.