

FOREWORD

In the spirit of this book, I'll take a shortcut and come right to the point: Buy this book. I assure you, you'll find the wisdom in this collection of shortcuts extremely helpful.

However, experience tells us to be leery of shortcuts. Very few work out. Horror movies begin when a group of teenagers take a shortcut through the woods on a dark night. The driver on a family trip opts for what looks like a shortcut and is reminded for years about how it turned out not to be. We're told "there are no shortcuts to success," and that success comes from a combination of perseverance and skill.

Yes, in life many shortcuts do not work out. The shortcuts in this book are different. They work.

I first met Ilan Goldstein online when a web search led me to his blog of Scrum shortcuts. He hadn't written many shortcuts by then, but the few he had were tremendously helpful—and funny. Ilan's sense of humor shone through in every shortcut.

It didn't take a genius to see that Ilan was onto something with his shortcuts. And so I asked him if he'd consider writing a book of shortcuts. This book is the result. In it, Ilan offers thirty tips, covering the full gamut of a Scrum implementation. He offers tips on getting started, on requirements, on estimating and planning. There are tips about quality and metrics, about team members and roles, about managing bosses, and about continuous improvement. If you've struggled with it on a Scrum project, it's likely Ilan has a shortcut to help you.

Ilan has been there and done that. His tips come from his experience as a Scrum-Master and Certified Scrum Trainer. His shortcuts all come from routes he's traveled. They're practical, not theoretical. Further, I like that he's not afraid to take a stand. Too many books rely too often on the consultant's standard answer of, "It depends." You won't find that here.

Whether you are a month, a year, or a decade into Scrum, you will find shortcuts here that will help you improve. I wish you well on your Scrum journey. I know you'll arrive more quickly by following the shortcuts in this book.

—Mike Cohn

Co-founder of the Scrum Alliance and the Agile Alliance
Author of *Succeeding with Agile*

PREFACE

“Ah, so it’s the opposite of Dilbert” was my psychiatrist friend’s reply when I gave him the quick overview of Scrum. (And no, I wasn’t seeing him to deal with the stress of writing my first book while my first baby kept me up all night!) Anyway, after a chuckle, I realized that not only had my friend distilled Scrum so simply and elegantly, but also, I had just found my opening quote!

Scrum and its agile cousins comprise the next serious evolution in vocational process and culture. I’m certainly not alone in observing that this is possibly the greatest leap forward since the advent of scientific management, aka Taylorism. (By the way, did you know that a certain Henry Gantt of painful stripy-chart fame was a disciple of Taylor?) Scrum throws away the dictatorial, power-is-cool, ego-driven management approach that views people as replaceable cogs in a defined-process machine. Instead, Scrum treats teams as groups of responsible, dedicated free-thinkers who, given the opportunity, will work in an optimal fashion to derive the most positive outcome.

It is tremendously exciting and a privilege to be in the vanguard of this change together with our early Scrum pioneers who are still energetically leading the charge. No doubt in decades to come, this period in time will be recognized as an era when a significant shift occurred in the way the workplace operates.

Why Did I Write This Book?

I recall a conversation that I had with Martin Kearns, another Australian-based Scrum trainer, who pointed out to me that like it or not, people are going to read this book (with its assortment of tactics, tools, and tips) and consider it to be an official user manual—something that they should follow to the letter. This highlighted a concern that I was already feeling: how could I offer specific, focused advice that cuts through the theory and straight to the chase without making it seem too prescriptive? The answer to that question is to explain that *Scrum Shortcuts without Cutting Corners* is about sharing with you *an* approach rather than *the* approach to implementing Scrum. How can you have more than one approach to Scrum? you might be wondering. This question is explained clearly by Kenneth Rubin in his book, *Essential Scrum* (2012):

Scrum is based on a small set of core values, principles, and practices (collectively the Scrum framework). Organizations using Scrum should embrace the

Scrum framework in its entirety; however, this doesn't mean that each organization's Scrum implementation will be the same. Rather, each organization will have its own unique implementation of the Scrum framework based on the specific approaches that it chooses to realize the Scrum practices. . . . An approach is a particular implementation of a Scrum practice.

There are many other approaches, with their own sets of tactics, tools, and tips that you can and should explore, but I hope that the ones that I lay out in this book will, at the very least, trigger some thought and offer you some tried and tested options.

I wrote this book because, along my journey, I have acquired a significant number of cuts and bruises from tripping over stumbling blocks and banging my head against brick walls—frankly, implementing Scrum is really tough! It makes a whole lot of sense when the theory is explained to you, but gee whiz, try to get it up and running effectively and it is anything but trivial. Over a number of years, and after working with several teams, I finally began to see some return on investment from the bodily harm that had been inflicted. I had created an adaptable (and emergent) Scrum recipe book that worked across numerous different teams and several organizations, and I realized my hard-earned knowledge could help out others working in similar environments.

Back to my chat with Martin, as he also offered me some helpful advice: noting that I had just become a new parent for the first time, he asked me whether I thought I should try to protect little Amy from every situation in which she might fall and hurt herself. My heart said, "Absolutely, I won't let anything hurt my little girl," but my brain realized that you have to let even those you care about trip over (on occasion) to learn what works and what doesn't. That being said, though, you certainly always want to be there to comfort them and to give them some helpful advice for next time. So, this book is just that—the helpful advice for "next time" to start limiting the extent of your cuts and bruises moving forward. I'm assuming that you have at least given Scrum a shot, so you are likely already carrying some old wounds, but with any luck, this book will protect you somewhat from the next round of knocks.

If, however, you are new to Scrum and really hate cuts and bruises, feel free to jump right in. Perhaps some of this advice will keep you injury-free . . . for a while. But bear this in mind: every project is different, every team is different, and every organization is different. So if you're expecting to successfully apply every piece of advice on every page, then I would like to realign your expectations right now before you are disappointed—honestly, there is no magic approach that will work across the board.

Finally, for those of you who feel you've pretty much got this whole Scrum thing all worked out and under control, I hope that by browsing this book you are able to find some interesting new tools to add to your Scrum toolbox.

Some Assumptions

Most of the lessons that I share throughout this book were obtained while I was a hands-on ScrumMaster in several organizations, and as such, the book's primary audience is the ScrumMaster. However, that certainly doesn't exclude others from benefiting, including product owners, developers, and senior stakeholders. Even my attorney wife, without an ounce of interest in the software scene, found it useful and interesting—so there you go!

I also assume that you are not brand new to Scrum. I expect that you have read a few books, perhaps attended some entry-level training, and even tried working with Scrum for a period of time. If you fall into this camp, this book is intended to help you reach the next level of Scrum efficiency and maturity by expanding and extending your Scrum toolbox.

If you are brand new to Scrum, never fear: this book contains many chapters (or *shortcuts*) that you will still be able to easily relate to. However, I recommend that you at least read one or all of the following short Scrum overviews:

- *Core Scrum* (Scrum Alliance, 2012)
- *The Scrum Guide* (Schwaber and Sutherland, 2011)
- *The Scrum Primer* (Deemer, Benefield, Larman, and Vodde 2010)

For a more comprehensive introduction to Scrum, I highly recommend you pick up Rubin's recently published book, *Essential Scrum* (Rubin 2012).

How to Use This Book

I didn't write this book sequentially, so don't feel obliged to read it in that manner. Although the book is broken up into logical sections, you can easily jump around to your heart's content without losing continuity.

The shortcuts are written to be quickly and easily absorbed. My goal is to ensure that they are so easy to digest that even in the heat of battle, they can come to your aid. Alternatively, during peaceful times, they can act as some useful yet entertaining reading while you wait in line for the office microwave at lunchtime.

Speaking of lunchtime, you can treat *Scrum Shortcuts without Cutting Corners* like a recipe book (or a spell book if you just so happen to be a wizard or witch)—simply flip to the shortcut you're after, decide whether the ingredients work for you, and if not, feel free to add your own spices . . . at your own risk. With any luck, out of the oven will materialize an immediately useful and highly practical approach to tackling a particular Scrum challenge.

My Goals

This book is not just about helping make Scrum work for you. It is also meant to help you elevate your Scrum teams to the next level of effectiveness and maturity. Most of what I've written is not covered in any Scrum guide (nor even in your typical Scrum-Master training course). Instead, these are real-world approaches to the Scrum practices that have been properly tested under fire.

A point worth reiterating is that I don't expect you to follow what is written in this book to the absolute letter. However, I do recommend that during your constant quest for continuous improvement, you at least experiment by inspecting a selection of these tactics, tools, and tips and adapting your own processes to see whether they lead to improvements. Ideally, you not only will benefit from my approach but will be able to further evolve it and teach me a thing or two!