



Stanford eCorner

Conduct a Pre-mortem Meeting

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/2673/Conduct-a-Pre-mortem-Meeting>

Author Guy Kawasaki suggests teams conduct a "pre-mortem" before launching a product. This technique allows teams to discover possible problems, or ways the launch could fail, while there is still time to make adjustments. Kawasaki explains this method is far more helpful, and far less contentious, than postmortem meetings that come too late to help.



Transcript

You should conduct a pre-mortem as opposed to a post-mortem. A post-mortem is something you do, obviously, after death. It's done to increase the peace of mind of the loved ones of the deceased. The problem with post-mortem is, duh, it's too late. There's another problem with post-mortem. Post-mortem in business is really too late because by the time a company implodes, most of the people have scattered to the winds. They're not going to stick around to the bitter end. And even if they stuck around, a post-mortem is very contentious. "You bozos wrote a piece of crap," as opposed to "You bozos couldn't market this brilliant piece of software that I created." A lot of finger pointing, a lot of angst and anger. I suggest you do a pre-mortem.

The way a pre-mortem works is before you ship, you ask the team, "Let us pretend that our product, our company failed. We failed. Now, what are all the possible reasons we could have failed?" Lack of distribution, unsophisticated sales force, boggy software, unreliable cloud services, whatever it is. So, you come up with all these reasons. And then, in unemotional way, you talk about how you can eliminate each of those reasons. This is very different than pointing the finger thing, "Engineering is crap." What you're saying is, "This is a list of reasons. Let's conduct a pre-mortem so that we never conduct a post-mortem." Conduct a pre-mortem.