

***“My Stories Aren't Long  
Enough... Except When  
They Are Too Long”***

**Rich Mironov  
ProductCamp Cascadia  
6 March 2021**



As a user,  
I want to  
do stuff.

@RichMironov

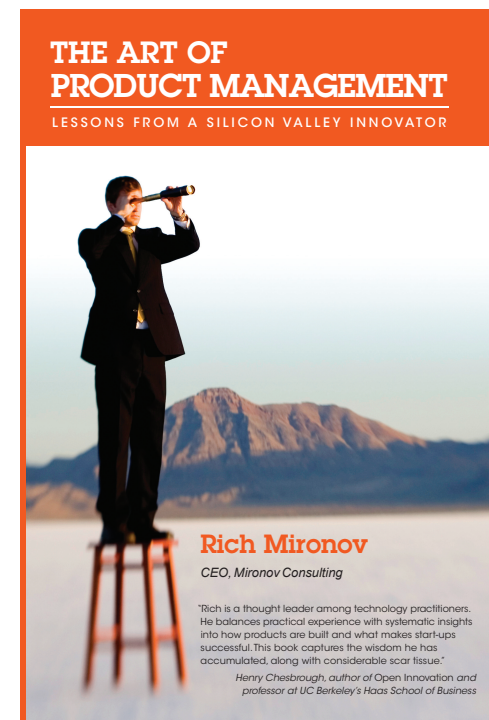
# About Rich Mironov

---



- Software product management (1988+)
  - Mentor product leaders, design product orgs
  - “Smokejumper” VP Product
- Blogger (2002+), founded Product Camp
- Agile development (2005+)
- Outcomes >> process

@RichMironov



# What My Development Team Told Me



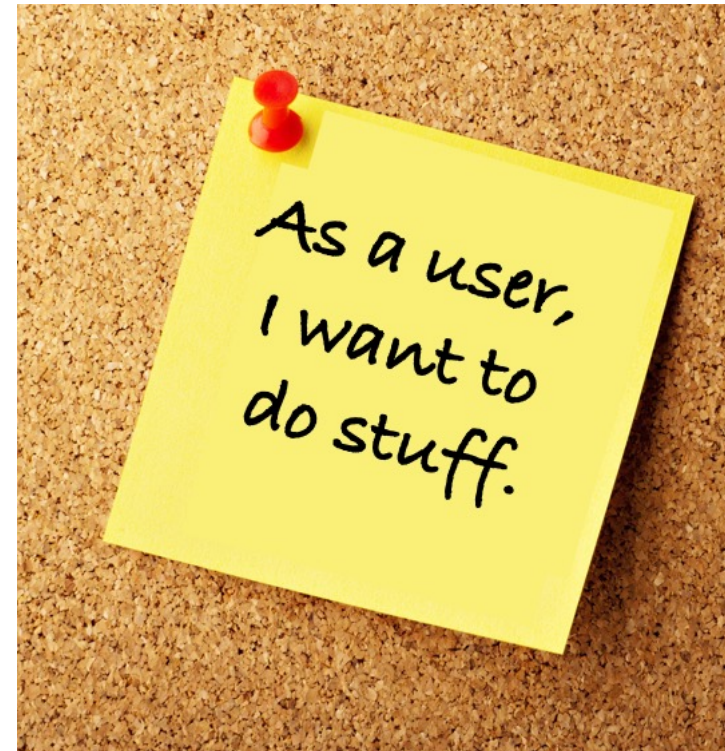
*“All of my user stories need more detail, more context, clearer success metrics.”*

And later...

*“All of my stories are too prescriptive, too focused on **HOW**, don’t give team room to creatively solve from a good **WHAT** statement.”*

What’s happening?

@RichMironov



***“What users say they want is  
often not what they really need  
— or what’s good for them.”***

**-Rich Mironov**

@RichMironov





# Symptoms or Root Causes?



- Most customer requests are poorly framed or incorrect
- Process suggestions often superficial
- ***“Doing what we’re told to do”*** rarely delivers desired outcomes
- Product managers must understand context, unpack issues, correctly frame problems, share with team
- Harness whole development team’s creativity



@RichMironov



# Manifesto for Agile Software Development

We are uncovering better ways of developing software by doing it and helping others do it.

Through this work we have come to value:

Individuals and interactions over processes and tools

~~Working software over comprehensive documentation~~

Customer collaboration over contract negotiation

Responding to change over following a plan

@RichMironov

# Rich's Markers for Strong Agile Orgs



1. Stable, whole teams tied to customer value streams
2. Product manager *and* team learn directly from end users (***not proxies***)
3. Whole team works on problems *as well as* solutions
4. Automated test suite, everyone writes tests
5. Objectives are end user behavioral changes (not delivery dates)
6. Frequent process retrospectives and experiments:  
team picks tools and processes that fit situation
7. Trust

# Three C's Are About Team Communication



- “**Card**” (or Post-It note): a physical token giving tangible and durable form to what would otherwise only be an abstraction
- “**Conversation**” is largely verbal but usually supplemented by documentation
- “**Confirmation**” that we’ve met objectives/delivered value/  
passed acceptance criteria

*After Ron Jeffries*

@RichMironov

*168 Search by Name*

*As a help desk operator I  
want to search for my  
customers by their first and  
last names so that customer  
response times remain short*



# Back To My Team's User Story Problem...



I took my team through a retrospective exercise:

- ***Which*** stories are too long? ***Why?***  
*What do they have in common?*
- ***Which*** stories are too short? ***Why?***  
*What do we notice?*

Realization: different kinds of stories  
may need different artifacts



@RichMironov

# My Team's Story Piles (Yours Will Vary)

Story Group	Likely Artifacts
UX/UI-heavy workflow changes	Behavioral goals, story boards, journey maps, unlikely paths, usability testing... my team wanted <i>more detail</i>
Performance, scalability, infrastructure	Internal metrics, technical hypotheses, team may write most stories... <i>less detail</i>
Lightweight bug fixes	Steps to reproduce... <i>less framing</i>
Validation, experiments, research	Clear learning goal, least code ( <i>or no code!</i> ) to test assumptions... <i>more context, more collaboration</i>
Refactoring, tech debt	Team-chosen, internally-focused improvement with no end user impact... <i>less detail</i>
Artwork, branding	Implement pixel-perfect rendering... <i>exact specs</i>

# These Might Look Like...

## Data retrieval bug:

- Enter invalid date
- Leave Acct# blank
- Click "update"
- UI returns 404

## Concierge validation test

- Add "rebalance your stock portfolio" button
  - When clicked, show "Will be rebalanced tonight"
  - Route via email to Ops for manual rebalancing
- Threshold: 0.5% of users

## 4x Faster Bootup:

Series of architect-led performance ideas  
*Do until fast enough...*

- team picks, prototypes
- if big improvement, push to production

*Diminishing returns?*

# Agile Product / User Story Takeaways



- No universal agile process: user stories are (just) tools
- Dig deep for root issues within superficial complaints
- ***“Do what I tell you”*** wastes half of team’s talent and most of their enthusiasm
- Focus on outcomes and concrete value, not velocity
- Start and finish what’s most important (WIP)
- Whole team engagement, retrospectives, experiments



@RichMironov





# Rich Mironov

Mironov Consulting  
Portland/Cascadia

[www.mironov.com](http://www.mironov.com)

+1-650-315-7394

[rich@mironov.com](mailto:rich@mironov.com)

@richmironov



@RichMironov