Naïve Optimism of Youth:

…“How long do you think it will take?” they’ll ask the technical hotshot, who may have been promoted to the rank of first-level supervisor just last week.

And, if the technical hotshot is ambitious and filled with youthful optimism (which often resembles the teenage delusions of immortality, omnipotence, and omniscience), the answer is likely to be, “No problem! We can probably knock it out over the weekend!” A really good software engineer—well, “hacker” might be a more appropriate description here—is firmly convinced that he or she can develop any system in a weekend. Minor details like documentation, error handling, editing of user inputs, and testing are so boring that they don’t count (page 12).

Identifying the Levels of Commitment of Project Participants

“I think you also have to make their commitments public through the use of a project plan. Everyone sees the total involvement of all team members this way and what their own involvement means to the project. It is up to the project manager to communicate this and make their commitment match their effort” (page 66).

Probably at the outset, everyone tells you they are committed, and they may even believe it themselves. The trick is to continually re-assess the team members’ commitment levels because they will almost certainly change over time and thus the efficiency and quality of death march work (a.k.a. senior project projects) will change (almost certainly for the worse) over time as well. It helps to be able to read minds.

Level of commitment is too vague to be useful to me. If I want to know what kind of commitment I can expect from someone, I would want to know what things in particular are more important to them than this project, and what things are less important.

Any statement of commitment can only describe how the team member feels right now, given what they know right now. If a manager asking about commitment really wants to know, “how committed will you be, regardless of what happens on the project, regardless of what happens in our outside life, regardless of what demands I may make of you?” then any answer the team member gives is likely to be useless.

Team Building Issues (page 115)

“You can’t make teams jell. You can hope they will jell; you can cross your fingers; you can act to improve the odds of jelling; but you can’t make it happen. The process is much too fragile to be controlled.”

Peopleware, DeMarco and Lister

If the jelling process is successful, there will usually be some visible signs. As DeMarco and Lister observe, successful teams typically have a strong sense of identity, a sense of eliteness, a feeling of joint ownership and a feeling that they can do good work and have fun.

“Pay attention to the relationships within the team, and put some effort into maintaining people’s ability to work together over time. A death march project (a.k.a. a senior project project) creates tremendous pressure that can amplify small disturbances into major conflicts. Periodic check-ins to “take the temperature” of the group can help you and the team deal with relationship and communication problems while they are still small.”