

A Guide to David Crawford's Turnaround Measure Tracker

Created by David Crawford and presented by Build Your Edge.



Watch the full episode

This handout complements David's *Build Your Edge* episode, *The Five-Step Plan to Rescue a Failing Project*. Start by listening to the conversation, as it brings these ideas to life and provides the context to get the most value from this guide.

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Episode 13

The Five Step Plan to Rescue a Failing Project

How to regain control, rebuild trust, and deliver under pressure.



David Crawford

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When the project starts to burn

You can feel it before you can prove it. Every leader knows that sinking feeling when momentum fades, trust wobbles, and you can't quite name what's wrong yet.

Sometimes it starts quietly. A few missed deadlines, a few nervous updates, and people start pointing fingers. The team's tired. Product says engineering's too slow. Engineering says requirements keep changing. Everyone's frustrated, and nothing's moving.

Then it grows louder. A client project slips. Promises made, promises missed. The customer's patience has run out, and now you're dealing with threats of legal letters, talk of penalties, and tense meetings that could end the relationship.

And finally, there's the worst kind; when the board's watching. The CEO's inbox is full of concern. They're not sure the CTO has delivery under control, and they don't feel technical enough to challenge the reassurances they're hearing. Optimism's no longer cutting it. They want facts. They want action.

Different scale, same feeling: something's broken, and you're the one who has to fix it. Before the next escalation call, before the next missed milestone, before someone starts rewriting history, you need the truth.

And that's where this tracker comes in.

The turnaround measure tracker

This is a practical, lightweight tool to help you get control of a project that's tripping over or is in free fall. It's built on the same five steps David Crawford uses whenever he's called in to "run toward the fire" and turn a wobbly project into a win.

You can download the tracker here: <https://www.buildyouredge.org/downloads/turnaround-measure-tracker>

The episode is available in video and audio on all major podcast platforms. Find all the links [here](#).

How and when to use the tracker

You don't have to wait until everything's on fire. Use it the moment something feels off, when you take over a new team, or when you simply want an honest view of where things stand.

It works just as well for a three-month internal project as it does for a multi-million-pound programme that's lost its way. The tracker is a simple spreadsheet that helps you find the signal in the noise, guiding your focus, week by week, to what really matters.

It's how you bring control, clarity, and progress back to even the toughest project.

You use it for five weeks, tracking five key metrics. Of course, you can use it for longer if needed, but by the end of the fifth week you generally know where you are. Sometimes, you'll get what you need in just a few.

You score your project each week, across five dimensions that reveal the real state of play:

1. Listen (but filter) - Hear everyone, but separate fact from emotion.
2. Find the talent and drainers - Identify who's driving progress and who's holding it back.
3. Face into stakeholders - Get in front of every key player and talk honestly.
4. Be ruthless (the 3× test) - Ask whether something truly belongs in scope – three times.
5. Plan backwards - Start with the target date and build back to reality.

Across the five weeks, you'll see which areas are improving and which remain blocked, and whether your interventions are working.

Step 1: Listen (but filter)

Your first job is to get face time with as many people as possible, fast. Don't hide behind dashboards or written reports. Talk to people.

Meet everyone connected to the project:

- The people responsible for delivery

- The people doing the work
- Internal stakeholders who depend on the outcome
- External partners and vendors
- Senior leaders feeling the pressure
- Customers, if you can reach them

Ask the same simple set of questions in every conversation. For example:

- How do you think the project is going?
- What's working well?
- What's slowing us down?
- What's one thing you'd change tomorrow if you could?

Keep the tone light and open. You're not auditing; you're listening.

Each week, measure what you've found using this scale:

1 = Team voices unheard / only hears noise

3 = Collected input, but not yet filtered into clear root causes

5 = Clear, agreed root causes, team feels heard but not drowned in emotion

A sample conversation

You're meeting a project manager who looks exhausted.

You ask, "How's it going?"

They sigh and say, "We're okay. A bit behind. Waiting on product sign-off again."

You nod. "How far behind?"

"Three weeks, maybe more."

"And what's holding you up?"

"Scope keeps changing. We never lock anything."

"Got it. What happens if we don't hit the next date?"

"They'll escalate to the COO. We can't afford that."

You don't challenge, defend, or reassure. You write it down.

Then you ask the same questions to a developer, a designer, a stakeholder, the COO; everyone.

By the end of the first week, you'll have a wall of insight and patterns will emerge.

When three people mention the same issue, you've found a root cause.

Step 2: Find the talent and drainers

From those conversations, you'll quickly see who's helping and who's hindering progress. The "talent" are the people who give constructive answers and want to fix things. The "drainers" are the ones who complain without solutions or who quietly resist every change.

Write down names under both columns.

Don't share the list, but use it to decide who to empower, who to support, and who to step around.

Each week, measure what you've found using this scale:

- 1 = Haven't identified who really understands the problems / who drains energy
- 3 = Some talent spotted, but not yet fully empowered; drainers still disruptive
- 5 = Key fixers engaged in delivery; drainers reassigned/redirected

Step 3: Face into stakeholders

When a project's failing, fear sets in. People stop talking, or only say what sounds safe. That's when you double down on communication.

Your goal is to get in front of everyone with a stake in the outcome, internal and external. Invite them to a short one-to-one or small-group discussion.

Ask direct, consistent questions:

- What's your understanding of where we are?
- What outcomes matter most to you right now?
- What support or clarity do you need from us?

You're not defending your position. You're gathering alignment.

Once they've spoken, summarise what you heard and confirm it in writing.

That small act of transparency rebuilds trust faster than any slide deck.

Each week, measure what you've found using this scale:

- 1 = Stakeholders kept at arm's length / little honesty
- 3 = Issues shared, but limited two-way collaboration
- 5 = Stakeholders fully engaged, providing support on scope, budget, and dates

Step 4: Be ruthless (the 3× test)

When everything feels critical, nothing gets delivered. The aim here is to discover what really, absolutely, must be delivered at the next milestone; think the 'M' in MoSCoW.

Your job is to help others see what could be descope for now in order that the team can deliver something meaningful. The more you can cut, the faster you can deliver.

That's when you use the 3× test, a simple but powerful filter to cut scope. Whenever someone insists a feature or task "must be done," ask:

- Do we need it for launch, or just eventually?

Sometimes people will very quickly agree to descope in the interests of crafting a solid, achievable delivery. At others, they will insist this item is critical. Don't take this at face value. Instead, gently ask again.

- If it slipped a month, what's the real impact?

This helps them crystallise the real need for launch (or the next big milestone) and the real impact of delaying until a follow on release. When they vocalise it out, they might realise that it can slip a bit.

Sometimes, they still see an item as essential. Again, come back and ask for a third and final time.

- If I gave you a successful launch without it, would you still want it?

By the third question, people usually admit it's optional. If not, you've found a core item you must focus on delivering now.

Every item you remove gives you time, focus, and breathing space to succeed.

Apply this test to everything: requirements, reports, approval processes, even meetings.

Each week, measure what you've found using this scale:

1 = Everything still seen as "must-have"

3 = Some prioritisation, but scope creep still present

5 = Ruthless cuts made; only true launch-critical items remain

Step 5: plan backwards

Once you've stripped the noise away, take the new reality and build backwards from the target date. Start with launch day and ask, "What absolutely needs to be true the day before this goes live?" Then repeat for the week before, and so on.

You'll end up with a lean, clear plan the team can actually deliver.

Each week, measure what you've found using this scale:

1 = Vague re-plans, unclear end-goal

3 = High-level backwards plan but gaps in detail or commitment

5 = Realistic, detailed backwards plan in place; team aligned on "good enough to go live"

Pulling it all together

At the end of each week, review what you've learned and complete the tracker.

Under each of the five headings, summarise:

- Where the project is at (based on your conversations and observations)
- The core problems (the real reasons things are off-track)
- Quick fixes (small, immediate actions you can take this week)
- Longer-term changes (structural or cultural improvements needed)
- Course of action (your next step and who's responsible)

After a few weeks, your tracker could look like this:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Week	Listen (but filter)	Find Talent & Drainers	Face into Stakeholders	Be Ruthless (x3 Test)	Plan Backwards	Overall Maturity Score
Week 1	1	3	2	1	5	2.4
Week 2	3	4	2	3	4	3.2
Week 3	5	5	5	5	5	5
Week 4						
Week 5						

This will enable you to see hotspots, areas that need most attention, and gradual progress toward stability.

Share your summary with the core team.

Don't frame it as a report. Frame it as a reset:

- Here's what we learned.
- Here's what we'll try next.

Over five weeks

You repeat this process each week, five rounds in total.

- By Week 2, you'll have clarity.
- By Week 3, early wins will start to appear.
- By Week 4, the mood will shift – people will see progress.
- By Week 5, you'll have momentum, evidence, and trust.

Your tracker becomes a story in itself: a visual record of recovery. It shows where you started, what changed, and how you brought the project back under control.

The bottom line

This isn't bureaucracy. It's leadership in motion.

If your project's burning, stop guessing. Get face time, ask the same questions, listen hard, cut scope, and plan backwards.

The tracker gives you structure and the discipline to stay calm when everyone else is losing their head. It's how you snatch victory from a burning project.

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