Mid-Sprint Reset

Facilitation guide · team, one facilitator

What this is: a fast, time-boxed halt you call when a cycle is losing pace. You stop the work for about twenty minutes, list everything the team is currently spending effort on, and sort it against one test: *would this actually save the cycle?* The gap between the two piles is the moment of recognition. Then you reset onto the work that matters and restart. Your job is to make stopping feel safe and fast — and to let the gap land before you move to the reset.

The one line to hold: the longer you keep working a broken plan, the more expensive the reset becomes. Behind doesn't mean "work harder" — it means "stop and reset the plan." **The halt buys time; it doesn't cost it. Twenty minutes of stopping can buy back the rest of the cycle.**

A note on language: we say "cycle" throughout — it works for a sprint, but also a project phase, a delivery wave, a quarter, or any bounded stretch of work that's going downhill. Use whatever word your team uses. And "reset the plan" just means: agree a fresh, smaller plan for the rest of the cycle.

· WHEN DO I USE THIS?

Use this when

GOOD FIT

A cycle that **looks on track** on paper, but the team is fighting several things at once, pace is collapsing, and effort is scattering across work that won't save it. Momentum is going downhill and no one has called a halt. **The trigger: on track on paper, struggling in reality.**

WRONG TOOL

Reality has changed and the plan itself is now wrong › Replan the Plan. A specific deliverable or date has already slipped › Delivery Recovery Path. The pace was never sustainable › Execution Pacing System. You're losing time to over-polishing › Good Enough Line. A demoralising setback has already happened › Momentum Rebuild.

The one test before you start: has a specific deliverable or date actually slipped? If yes, that's Delivery Recovery Path — recover the outcome. If the team is still "on track" on paper but visibly pushing hard and losing momentum, that's this tool — recover the *execution*.

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PART 1 RUNNING THE HALT

~20 minutes, time-boxed

1 · WHAT IS THIS REALLY DOING?

The one idea

When a team is behind, the instinct is to work harder — but harder on a broken plan just spends more effort before the inevitable reset, which gets costlier the longer it's delayed. **The obstacle isn't an inability to prioritise; it's an inability to stop.** A short, deliberate halt removes the fear that pausing wastes time. Then sorting current effort against what would actually save the cycle makes it impossible to miss that effort is going to the wrong work — and gives the team permission to restart with a simpler, more realistic plan.

2 · WHAT DO I NEED?

What you'll need

One real cycle that's slipping (core)	A real, current cycle that's sagging — not finished, not yet collapsed. The team must feel the pace slipping *now*.
A visible timer (core)	The halt is time-boxed. Visible time pressure is what keeps the reset fast and stops it turning into a meeting.
Two labelled columns and cards (core)	**One work item per card.** Two columns: "Will save the cycle" and "Won't save the cycle." The sort is where the recognition happens — don't let people group work together on one card.
One facilitator	Calls the halt, keeps it tight (~20 min), runs the sort, and protects the restart — so it doesn't become a look-back review.

Resilience · Sustain Momentum · ~20 minutes, time-boxed. Keep it fast — this is a halt, not a meeting.

3 · HOW DO I RUN IT?

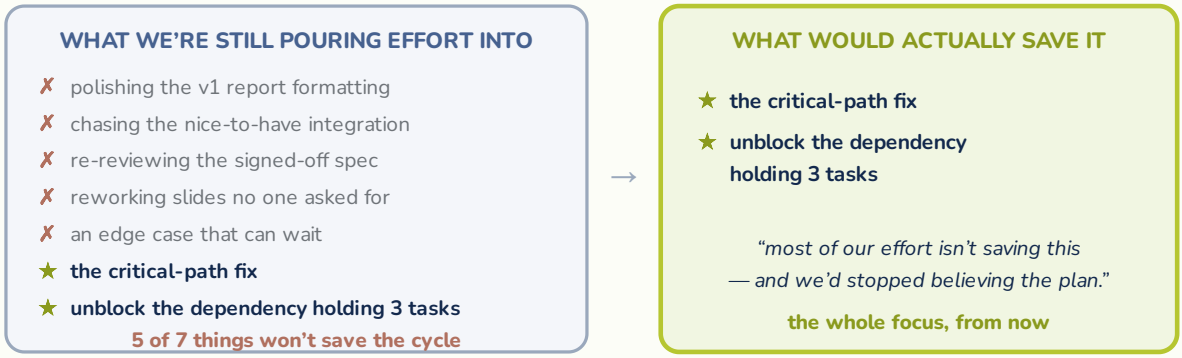
The run-sheet

Set the timer (~20 min) and run these in order. The bold part is what you say or do; the move under it is where you add the most. Protect Step 3 (the sort) and Step 4 (the explicit drop) — that's where the value is.

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1. Call the halt	**2 min**	*"We're behind, and we're about to spend the next few days pushing hard on the current plan. We're going to stop for twenty minutes instead."* Start the timer. Name that stopping is the move, not the failure — **the permission to stop is the intervention.**
2. List what we're spending effort on	**5 min**	*"Quick — everything in flight right now. What is each person actually working on?"* One work item per card. Capture honestly, *before* judging — including the polishing, the nice-to-haves, the rework no one questioned. Don't debate value yet.
3. Sort: what would actually save this?	**6 min**	*"Now mark each one: would this actually save the cycle — or not?"* Ask the team to agree each card before it moves — **no silent sorting.** Be ruthless: "save" means it protects the outcome that matters, not "it's useful" or "it's nearly done."
4. Reset the plan and restart	**7 min**	*"For the rest of the cycle, the must-win work is the whole focus. Everything else is dropped or deferred — explicitly."* Name what stops, out loud. Assign owners. Then **close the meeting and restart work immediately, using only the must-win list** — don't carry on discussing.

THE GAP BETWEEN THE TWO PILES IS THE REVEAL



Don't rush past the gap. Let someone say "most of this isn't going to save us" — then reset onto the few that will.

DON'T RESCUE THE TEAM FROM THE REVEAL

If the room goes quiet after the sort, **let it.** Resist the urge to explain the lesson yourself, fill the silence, or soften what the board is showing. The activity works because the team notices the gap on its own — a facilitator who narrates the insight has taken it away from them. Your job is to hold the silence long enough for someone in the room to say it out loud.

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THE GAP IS THE REVEAL — LET IT LAND

This is the moment. When the team sees most of its effort sitting in the "won't save it" column, the recognition arrives on its own. **Don't rush past it.** Let someone say it: "most of what we're doing isn't going to save this." That sentence — and the quieter one underneath, "we'd stopped believing the plan a while ago" — is the whole tool. **If the team tries to keep everything** ("it all saves the cycle"), force the sort with a capacity question: **"if you lost half your remaining capacity tomorrow, what survives?"** or **"if you could finish only two things before the deadline, which two?"** Scarcity forces the ranking that "is it useful?" never will.

Watch for these signals — the reveal is landing: the "won't save it" pile is visibly bigger than the "would save it" pile · someone says a version of "most of this isn't actually going to help" · a quieter admission — "honestly, we knew the plan was off a week ago" · relief, not defensiveness. The room stops defending the current plan and starts asking "so what actually saves this?" That shift is the reveal becoming a reset.

PART 2 GETTING IT RIGHT

why it works, redirects & mistakes

4 · WHY DOES THIS WORK?

Why a halt — and why the sort, not a re-plan

The choice	Why it's load-bearing
A time-boxed halt	The team won't stop on its own because pausing feels like losing time. A short, bounded, deliberate stop removes that fear — and the timer proves the halt is cheap.
Sort current effort vs what would save it	A re-plan from scratch ignores the real problem: effort is *already* pouring into the wrong work. Sorting what's actually in flight against what would save the cycle shows that effort is going to the wrong work — that gap is the reveal.
Drop explicitly, then restart	Quietly pushing work down the list lets it creep back. Naming what stops — out loud — is what frees the capacity to re-focus on the must-win work.

THE ONE FAILURE MODE

Becoming a status meeting or a look-back review. If the team lists problems, feels busy, and goes back to the same plan, it failed. **If the halt becomes a meeting, the tool has failed.** The deliverable is a reset cycle with fewer things and restored momentum — not a discussion. Keep the timer visible.

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5 · WHAT WILL THE TEAM SAY?

What they say — and your move

These are the lines that keep the team pushing on the broken plan. Each has a one-sentence redirect.

What they say	Your response
“We don’t have time to stop.”	“That’s exactly why we’re stopping. Twenty minutes now buys back the rest of the cycle.”
“If we just push harder we’ll catch up.”	“On which plan? Let’s check it still saves the cycle before we spend more effort on it.”
“It’s all important.”	“Then nothing’s being saved. Which two things, if we finished only those, would save the cycle?”
“We’ve already invested in that work.”	“We have — and continuing it costs more. The effort already spent doesn’t come back; the remaining time does.”

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6 · WHAT IF IT GOES WRONG?

Common mistakes & edge cases

What happened	The fix
You skipped the halt	"We'll just re-prioritise quickly" keeps the team in the grind. The halt is the whole reason the tool works.
The sort became a debate about value	"Save the cycle" is the only test — not "useful," not "nearly done."
"Everything here saves the cycle"	The most common failure mode. Don't argue item by item — force the sort with the capacity question: "if you could finish only two things before the deadline, which two?"
Work was pushed quietly down the list	Dropped work creeps back. Name what stops, out loud: "we are not finishing the polish this cycle."
It became a look-back review	This is a fast in-flight reset, not a post-mortem. Redirect to "what saves the cycle from here?"
Nothing will save the cycle	An honest and useful outcome — the cycle may need re-scoping or escalating, not rescuing. Name it now rather than discovering it at the deadline.
The team won't agree to stop	Time-box it harder: "ten minutes, that's all." Once they see the gap, resistance usually drops. If a leader blocks the halt, that's the real blocker — name it.
It slid into blame	Redirect to the work, not the people: "we're not asking who, we're asking what saves the cycle from here."
The same cycle keeps needing resets	This is the in-the-moment fix; the long-run one is Execution Pacing System. If you're resetting every cycle, the pace itself is unsustainable — pair them.

Before you close the halt

- ✓ The halt was real and time-boxed — not a quick re-prioritise in the grind
- ✓ The team agreed each card, and saw the gap between the two piles
- ✓ What stops was named *out loud* — not quietly pushed down the list
- ✓ The team restarted immediately on the must-win list, with owners

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7 · HOW DO I MAKE THIS STICK?

Take it back to work

THE HABIT

When you're behind, don't ask "how do we work harder?" — ask:

"Is most of our remaining effort actually going into what will save this cycle?"

If not, stop and reset now — the reset only gets more expensive the longer you leave it.

Appendix · Reference

You should not need this to start. Read it before, or if a run goes sideways.

8 · A WORKED RUN

Watch the facilitator move

Stage	What happened
The halt	"We're three days behind on the release and everyone's flat out. We're stopping for twenty minutes." Timer starts.
The list	Seven cards go up, exactly as the team names them: *polishing the v1 report formatting · chasing the nice-to-have integration · re-reviewing the already-signed-off spec · the critical-path fix · reworking slides no one asked for · investigating an edge case that can wait · unblock the dependency holding 3 tasks.*
The sort	"Mark each: would this actually save the release?" Two survive. Let the silence sit as five cards stay in the "won't save it" column.
The reveal	"…most of what we're doing isn't going to save this. Honestly — we knew the plan was off last week and just kept going."
The reset	"Those two are the whole focus till Friday. Everything else is dropped or deferred — say it out loud. Restart at 2pm."

They walked in three days behind and pushing hard on seven things. They left twenty minutes later focused on the two that would save the release — and clear that continuing the old plan would have cost them the cycle. **The halt bought the time it seemed to cost.**

· WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

Where this sits in the Gym

Several tools deal with work going wrong. Reach for the one that matches what's actually happening.

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WORK IS GOING WRONG — WHICH TOOL?

- **MID-SPRINT RESET (this tool)**
  on track on paper, but firefighting and losing momentum — the plan is still valid, the team lost focus
- **REPLAN THE PLAN**
  reality changed — the plan itself is now wrong. Rebuild it, don't refocus it.
- **DELIVERY RECOVERY PATH**
  a specific deliverable or date has already slipped — recover the threatened outcome.
- **EXECUTION PACING SYSTEM**
  the pace was never sustainable and this keeps happening every cycle — prevention.

The trigger for this tool: "on track on paper, struggling in reality."

What's actually happening	Use this
Time is lost to refining work that's already good enough	**Good Enough Line** — set the done-standard and stop.
A demoralising setback has happened; the team is deflated	**Momentum Rebuild** — rebuild agency after the setback.

The move underneath: Mid-Sprint Reset is the in-the-moment, in-cycle, execution-focused fix — the work system is going downhill and you stop to reset it. It isn't a rebuild of the plan (Replan the Plan), an outcome recovery (Delivery Recovery Path), prevention (Execution Pacing System), or a morale rebuild (Momentum Rebuild). When you're behind, stopping *is* the move.

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