

## Ask the Experts: November, 2009

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**Topic:** Managing a schedule with Drop-dead deadlines

**Gail of Hoffman Estates, IL** asks: I have dates that I just can't miss. What is the best way to plan for those dates and make sure that I am on schedule to make my targets?

**Answer:** What I would recommend when you are facing dates that you can't miss is to originally plan a project schedule from the ending date and use milestones to represent the important short and long term goals for the schedule. Put deadlines on the milestones and then manage the project as planned from the start date.

Here are the steps to make this happen:

1. Project → Project Information  
Schedule from → Project finish date  
Finish date → enter the drop-dead date for the project  
Click OK
2. Enter your tasks using milestones for your short term and finish dates of the schedule. **DO NOT SET CONSTRAINTS ON THESE DATES OR ENTER DATES IN THE START AND FINISH COLUMNS.** Build in all of the work of the project as you normally would. Planning a project from the ending date will automatically plan tasks using the As Last as Possible constraint.
3. After all of the work of the project has been entered into the schedule enter Deadlines on the milestones which are the important not to be missed dates. These will become your target dates that you will be managing your work against. Do not put deadlines on the "nice to be there" tasks but enter the hard dates that are important to the project.
  - A. To enter Deadlines for a task: Double click on the task to open the Task Information form → Advanced Tab → enter deadline date.
  - B. Another easy way if you have several deadlines to enter is to insert the Deadline column and enter the dates on the tasks that will need them.
4. The last step is to flip the project back to being planned from the start date. This way you can now manage to the deadline dates you have entered. If you do not manage from the start date there is not any effective way to tell if you will be actually able to make your drop-dead dates. **NOTE: if you have entered constraints this might not work right.**

To switch your schedule to being planned from the Project Start date:

Project → Project Information  
Schedule from → Project start date  
Start date → enter the drop-dead date for the project  
Click OK

