SCRUM MASTER Certification Guide

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Chapter 7

The Scrum Master

People new to Scrum often assume that the Scrum Master has a great deal of power over other members of the Scrum Team.

They don't.

Scrum Masters don't have much power at all.

Most of what a Scrum Master does revolves around coaching and educating people about the Scrum framework.

- The Scrum Master doesn't make decisions about the Product
- The Scrum Master doesn't tell the developers how to manage their work
- The Scrum Master can't make changes to the Product Backlog
- The Scrum Master can't make changes to the work planned for the Sprint
- The Scrum Master can't hire or fire people

Even when the Scrum Master does do something of substance, such as helping to remove impediments or acting as a *leader who serves,* they typically achieve this by educating others about how Scrum is supposed to work and coaching people about how to properly embrace the ideas expressed in the Scrum Guide.

Scrum Requires a Scrum Master

> The Scrum Master is accountable for establishing Scrum as defined in the Scrum Guide.
>
> They do this by helping everyone understand Scrum theory and practice, both within the Scrum Team and the organization.
>
> The Scrum Master is accountable for the Scrum Team's effectiveness. They do this by enabling the Scrum Team to improve its practices, within the Scrum framework.
>
> — 2020 Scrum Guide page 6

Test Yourself

The developers say they don't feel ready to start development and would like to do an infrastructure Sprint to get everything set up first. However, the Product Owner wants to get the first Sprint, and the first increment, under the team's belt. What should the Scrum Master do? (Choose 1)

- ▢ Cancel the first Sprint.
- ▢ Tell the developers there will not be an 'infrastructure Sprint.'
- ▢ Tell the Product Owner there will be no Increment on the first Sprint.
- ▢ Help the Scrum Developers understand the importance Scrum places on creating an increment in every Sprint.

Option D is correct.

The job of the Scrum Master is large to coach, facilitate and help both the Scrum Team and the organization understand how Scrum works.

A Scrum Master does not:

- Manage the project
- Assign tasks to members of the team
- *Tell* developers what to do
- Cancel, delay, or extend Sprints
- Assign developers to teams
- Manage budget money

Scrum Masters and Servant Leadership

Previous editions of the Scrum Guide talked about servant leadership. Yet the 2020 Scrum Guide removes all references to the term 'servant leader.'

Instead, the 2020 Scrum Guide includes this line that spins the idea of servant leadership around a bit:

> Scrum Masters are true leaders who serve the Scrum Team and the larger organization.
>
> — 2020 Scrum Guide page 6

The Scrum Guide always tries to be very precise in its words.

The stewards of the Scrum framework want everyone to know that a Scrum Master is a leader first, and then a servant to the team. They are a leader who serves, not a servant who leads.

It's a persnickety distinction, but an important one nevertheless.

Test Yourself

Which of the following statements is most true about a Scrum Master?

- ▢ The Scrum Master manages their team with a command and control approach to leadership
- ▢ The Scrum Master is a leader first, and a servant to their Scrum Team second
- ▢ The Scrum Master is a servant-leader on the Scrum Team
- ▢ The Scrum Master is a leader and not a servant

Option B is correct.

The Scrum Master is a leader first who also serves the team.

How Scrum Masters Serve the Scrum Team

> The Scrum Master serves the Scrum Team in several ways, including:
>
> - Coaching the team members in self-management and cross-functionality;
> - Helping the Scrum Team focus on creating high-value Increments that meet the Definition of Done;
> - Causing the removal of impediments to the Scrum Team's progress; and,
> - Ensuring that all Scrum events take place and are positive, productive, and kept within the timebox.
>
> — 2020 Scrum Guide page 6

The first two bullet points emphasize the point made earlier in the Scrum Guide. Namely that the Scrum Master is there to help the team by coaching them on how Scrum work.

Notice the use of terms such as 'coaching' and 'helping' in the definition of the Scrum Master's responsibilities.

On the Scrum Certification exam, if you ever see an option that implies a Scrum Master will force somebody to do something, or *tell* somebody to do something, that option will typically be wrong.

A Scrum Master is a coach, a diplomat, a leader who serves, and a facilitator. They are not managers or commanders who coerce others through intimidation or Machiavellian tactics.

Test Yourself

Blah, blah, blah Developer problem. Blah, blah, blah what should the Scrum Master do? (Select 2)

- ▢ Tell the Developer to blah, blah, blah...

- ▢ Coach the Developer on blah, blah, blah…
- ▢ Instruct the Developer to blah, blah, blah…
- ▢ Facilitate the Developer with blah, blah, blah…
- ▢ Force the Developer blah, blah, blah…

Options B and D are correct.

There will be questions on the Scrum Certification exam where some of the options include the Scrum Master telling, instructing, insisting, or demanding a Developer does something. Answers like that will always be wrong and can be disqualified immediately.

A Scrum Master is a coach, facilitator, and a leader who serves. They are not army generals.

Removal of Impediments

The Scrum Guide says the Scrum Master should work to cause the removal of impediments to the progress of the team.

> The Scrum Master serves the Scrum Team by causing removal of impediments to the Scrum Team's progress
>
> — 2020 Scrum Guide page 6

So what's an impediment?

It's important to keep in mind that we are talking about impediments within the context of the Scrum framework.

For example, if a manager starts asking for daily status reports from the developers detailing what they're working on, that infringes on the development team's ability to self-manage.

The demand to needlessly fill out status reports that zap the dev team's productivity is an impediment that the Scrum Master should work to remove.

In this case, the Scrum Master would coach management on the need to allow developers to manage themselves, while at the same time showing the managers how the Sprint Backlog and the Sprint Review are much better ways to gain insight into the progress of the development.

Similarly, if a manager is trying to attend the Daily Scrum, or the Product Owner is not properly communicating the details of their Product Backlog items, these are impediments the Scrum Master can work to remove.

In the Context of Scrum

Impediments that fall outside the context of Scrum are not typically things the Scrum Master would be expected to solve.

For example, if a developer can't figure out how to book a conference room for the Daily Scrum,

that's not exactly a blocker for the Scrum Master to solve. Or if the computer hosting the Git repository goes up in flames and the team needs a new computer, that's not a blocker the Scrum Master would be expected to address either.

The Scrum Master works to cause the removal of blockers that slow the team down, but only within the context of the Scrum Framework. Removing blockers typically involves coaching and educating others about Scrum.

Test Yourself

A developer who has taken on the task of booking a conference room for the daily scrum has found the company's booking system to be an impediment, and they can't manage to book the same room every day of the week, even though they know that is a requirement of the Scrum Guide. What should the Scrum Master do in this circumstance? (Choose 1)

- ▢ The Scrum Master should remove the blocker by learning the booking system and booking the room for the developer
- ▢ Allow the developer to book a different room each day for the daily Scrum
- ▢ Coach the developer on the importance of Scrum Events always taking place at the same time and location
- ▢ Have the developer only schedule the Daily Scrum on days when the same room is available

Option C is correct.

The booking system may be a blocker or impediment to the developer, but it does not impede progress in terms of the Scrum framework. It's not the Scrum Master's job to teach a developer how to use their own tools.

Perhaps a Scrum Master could advise the developer on how to find training that would teach them how to better use the tool, or facilitate a learning session with other developers where knowledge sharing about the booking system could happen. But doing the developer's work for them is not what the Scrum Guide means when it talks about removing impediments.

In this case, the only correct option in the question is for the Scrum Master to coach the developer on the importance of having Scrum Events always take place at the same time and location, so long as it's reasonable to do so.

Examples of Impediments a Scrum Master Can Resolve

The types of impediments a Scrum Master is expected to help solve are typically things that go beyond issues that self-managed and self-organized teams can solve on their own, while at the same time falling within the context of Scrum. Examples include:

- Availability of the Product Owner

- The team being pushed beyond a sustainable pace
- External attempts to micro-manage the team
- Management scheduling needless meetings
- Poorly described backlog items
- Unclear Sprint and Product Goals

All of these issues are impediments the Scrum Master should be able to help remove through coaching, facilitation, and educating people about the proper application of the Scrum framework.

Positive, Productive, and Timeboxed

The final bullet point from the Scrum Guide emphasizes the Scrum Master's role in making sure all Scrum events happen throughout the Sprint, that they are productive, and that they are time-boxed.

> The Scrum Master serves the Scrum Team by ensuring that all Scrum events take place and are positive, productive, and kept within the timebox.
>
> — 2020 Scrum Guide page 6

When answering questions on the certification exam, remember that according to this point:

- It's the Scrum Master's job to ensure that all Scrum Events take place
- It's the Scrum Master's job to ensure that all Scrum Events fall within their timebox
- It's the Scrum Master's job to ensure all Scrum Events are positive
- It's the Scrum Master's job to ensure all Scrum Events take place at the same time
- It's the Scrum Master's job to ensure all Scrum Events take place in the same location

Positivity, Occurrence, and Timeboxing

There will be questions on the exam that state the developers don't want to do the Daily Scrum every day, or they want to hold the Daily Scrum in different locations on certain days of the month.

In these situations, the Scrum Master much coach the team on the importance of taking part in all Scrum events and making sure they take place at the same time and in the same location every time.

There will also be questions about whose job it is to keep Scrum Events within their allotted time. In situations like these, it is the Scrum Master's job to coach the team about the importance of keeping within the timebox.

Other questions will say that developers are not enjoying the Daily Scrum, or they don't want to take part in the Sprint Review or Retrospective. In these situations, it's the Scrum Master's job to coach the team about the importance of these events and try to facilitate a strategy that will make the events more positive and rewarding for those who attend them.

Test Yourself

The Scrum Developers are frustrated, not clear on what they are developing, and do not want to attend the Daily Scrum. What should the Scrum Master do? (Select 2)

- ▢ Cancel the Daily Scrum so the developers can focus on their work.
- ▢ Coach the team on the value the Daily Scrum brings to the team.
- ▢ Reprimand developers who don't attend the Daily Scrum
- ▢ Facilitate the creation of a clearer Sprint goal during the next Sprint Planning event

B and D are correct.

The Scrum Master can't cancel any Scrum Events.

The Scrum Master must coach the team to ensure all Scrum Events take place, are positive, and are productive, so option A is incorrect.

The Scrum Master also doesn't have the authority to reprimand anyone, so option C is incorrect.

The Scrum Master also should coach the team on the value of the Daily Scrum, and also help the team create clearer goals so they have more focus on future Sprints.

Scrum Master and the Product Owner

> The Scrum Master serves the Product Owner in several ways, including:
>
> - Helping find techniques for effective Product Goal definition and Product Backlog management;
> - Helping the Scrum Team understand the need for clear and concise Product Backlog items;
> - Helping establish empirical product planning for a complex environment;
>
> — 2020 Scrum Guide page 6

Notice how the term 'helping' is used repeatedly when describing how the Scrum Master serves the Product Owner. Furthermore, each item the Scrum Master is helping with is an element of Scrum, such as:

- The Product Goal
- The Product Backlog
- Empiricism

Helping the Product Owner with these things works to remove impediments for the team.

For example, poorly defined Product Backlog items make it difficult for the developers to understand what is required of them. Encouraging the Product Owner to create clear Product Backlog items removes an impediment.

Product Owner Impediments

A poorly defined Product Goal means it's not clear what the Scrum Team's efforts are aiming at.

By helping the Product Owner effectively define the Product Goal, another impediment to progress is removed.

A lack of empirical product planning can lead to budgetary problems, timelines getting overshot and development grinding to a halt because of unsatisfied dependencies on other teams.

These are all impediments to progress that can be resolved if the Scrum Master helps the Product Owner to more effectively do what the Scrum Guide requires of them.

The Scrum Master and the Stakeholders

Many people approach Scrum with the assumption that the framework employs some type of command and control structure that rigidly defines hierarchies and sets boundaries around who can talk to each other and when.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Developers, Scrum Masters, Product Owners, stakeholders, and even customers are encouraged to talk to each other. There are no rules in Scrum about stakeholders only talking to Product Owners, or developers not being allowed to talk to customers.

Scrum promotes the exact opposite type of approach. Scrum values openness and transparency.

One of the Scrum Master's main responsibilities is to remove barriers between the stakeholders and the Scrum Team, helping to open up channels of communication and enhance transparency in the process.

Removing Barriers Between Stakeholders and Teams

Imagine a small startup where the office has 8 desks for the following people:

- The two owners of the startup, who are also the stakeholders in the product being built
- One Product Owner
- One Scrum Master
- Four developers

Do you think the stakeholders and the developers should never talk to each other in that situation?

Do you think there should be some rule that says the owners should put on noise-cancelling headsets any time two developers talk about the project?

Or do you think it would improve transparency if the developers and the stakeholders talked to each other all the time?

One of the jobs of the Scrum Master is to remove barriers between stakeholders and Scrum Teams. It's always preferable to have open and healthy lines of communication between everyone on a

project.

> The Scrum Master serves the organization by removing barriers between stakeholders and Scrum Teams.
>
> — 2020 Scrum Guide page 6

Some people also get the incorrect impression that developers can only talk to stakeholders during the Sprint Review.

The Sprint Review is a scheduled event that makes sure the stakeholders and the Scrum Team get a chance to talk, but it is not the only time such communication is allowed. Openness and transparency are always better than secrecy and ambiguity.

Planning and Advising

The Scrum Guide doesn't speak much about activities that happen outside of a Sprint. However, the Scrum Guide does say the Scrum Master is expected to help an organization get up and running with Scrum by helping to plan the adoption of Scrum.

> The Scrum Master serves the organization by planning and advising Scrum implementations within the organization
>
> — 2020 Scrum Guide page 6

Along with helping to get Scrum up and running, the Scrum Master is also expected to help the organization as a whole by coaching others about how Scrum works and how Scrum's empirical approach to problem-solving can aid in product development.

> The Scrum Master serves the organization in several ways, including:
>
> - Leading, training, and coaching the organization in its Scrum adoption;
> - Helping employees and stakeholders understand and enact an empirical approach for complex work; and,
>
> — 2020 Scrum Guide page 6

The job of the Scrum Master is to teach people how to do Scrum, how to implement Scrum, and how to improve on Scrum-based practices.

Test Yourself

The management wants regular status updates on the progress of the project, so they have scheduled a standup meeting every Friday afternoon.

How should you, as the Scrum Master, handle this situation?

- ▢ Tell the development team they need to attend a Friday afternoon standup meeting
- ▢ Replace Friday's Daily Scrum with management's standup meeting
- ▢ Have the Product Owner speak to the management about the need for the Friday meeting

- ▢ Speak personally to the management about the need for the Friday meeting

Option D is correct.

In this case, there is an issue between the Stakeholders and the Scrum Team.

Hopefully, management can be coached on the transparency built into Scrum, and gain enough value from the Sprint Review to remove the request for additional meetings with the Scrum Teams.

Also, by keeping the Scrum Developers out of an unneeded meeting, the Scrum Master has removed an impediment to the Scrum team.