

Coaching the Coaches

Scrum Gathering Deep Dive Workshop

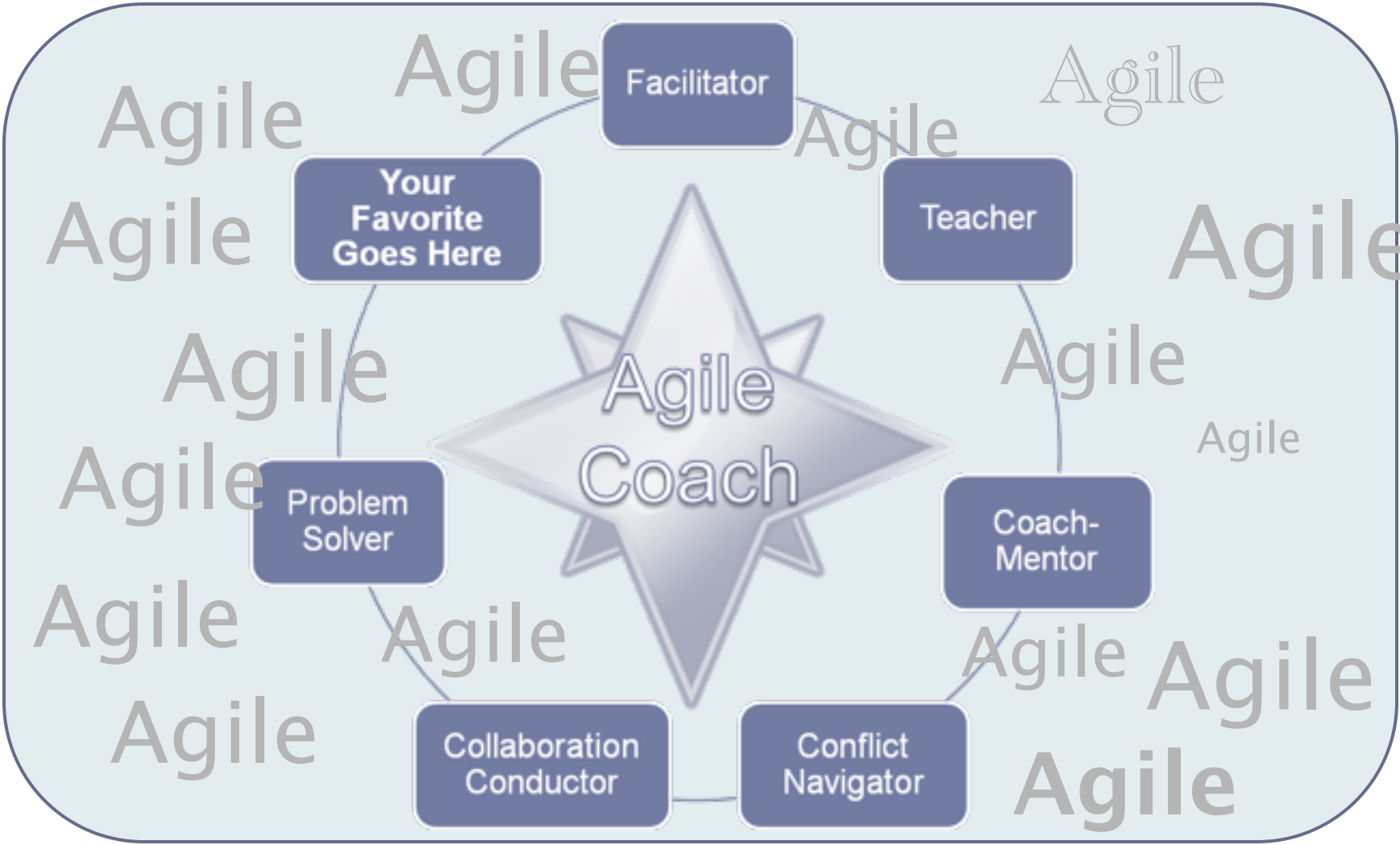
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CoachingAgileTeams.com

What is Agile Coaching?

An agile coach...

...someone who takes teams beyond getting agile practices up and running, into their deliberate and joyful pursuit of high performance.

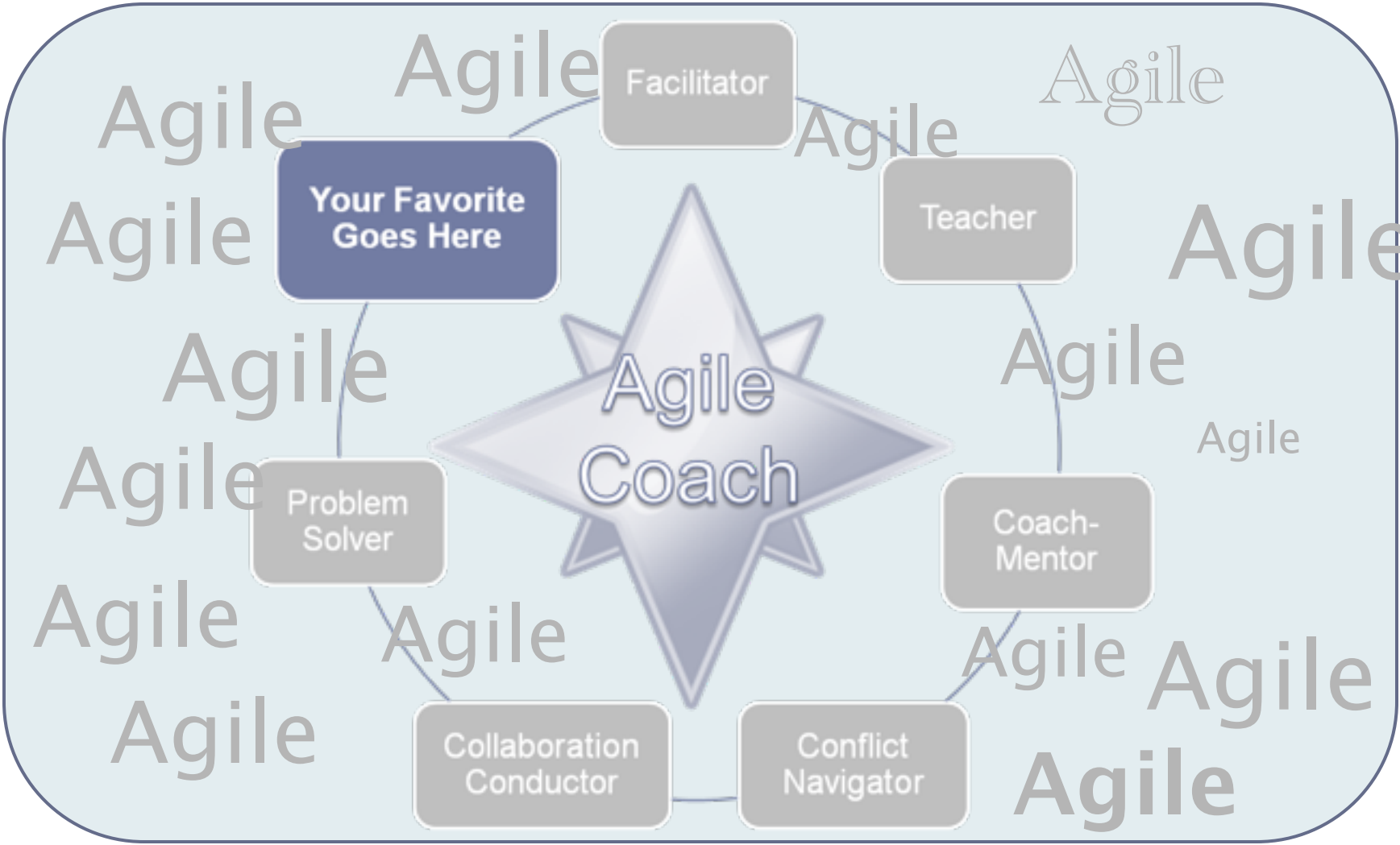
Agile is sufficient; coaching deepens it



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Bring in the allied disciplines



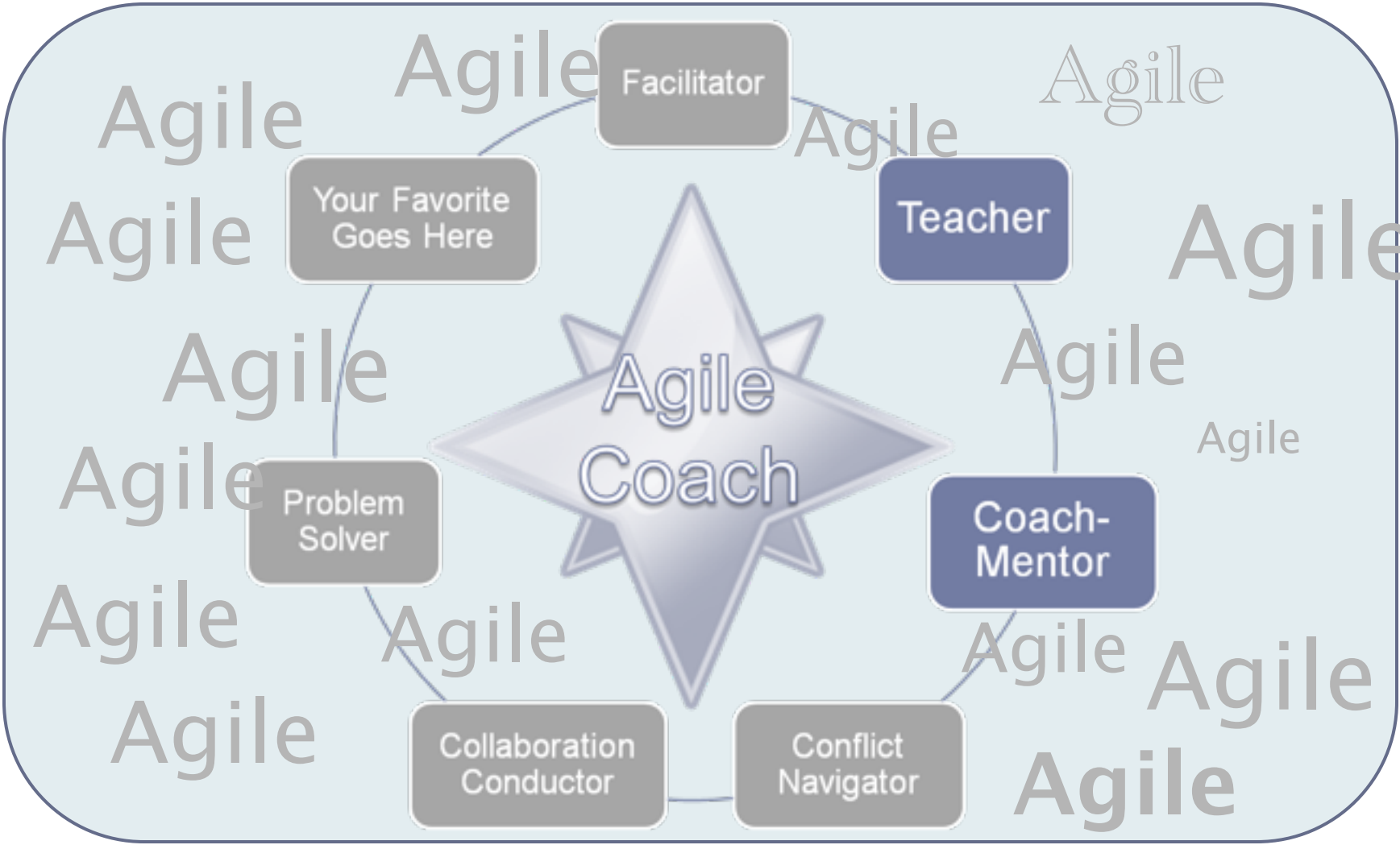
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Your Favorite Goes Here – write yours in. Your experience is just as valid as mine, so keep in mind that everything I say comes from my personal journey from project manager to agile coach. This is all about one good way to coach – my way. Your ways are valid, too.

Since we’re here together, let’s learn what I’ve learned.

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Where we're going this morning

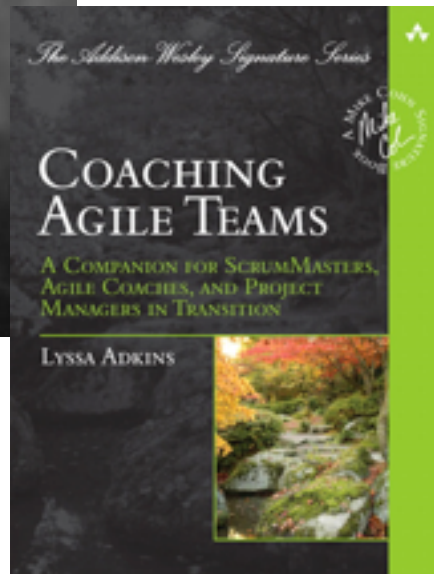


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Today, we'll focus on a few mindsets and skills from two areas: Coach as Teacher and Coach as Coach-Mentor.



Who is Lyssa?



Before Scrum

- ▶ 15-year career in project and program management
- ▶ PMO director
- ▶ PMP
- ▶ Six Sigma Green Belt

After Scrum

- ▶ All that + Certified Scrum Trainer and
 - ▶ a belief that teams really do know what's best
 - ▶ a rabid focus on delivering business value
- ▶ Scrum Coach
- ▶ Co-active Coach

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Hello from Lyssa Adkins! I am certified as a Scrum Trainer and I am also an Agile Coach. I came to Agile as a project leader with over 15 years' project management expertise. Even with all that experience, nothing prepared me for the power and simplicity of Agile done well.

My Agile experience, along with my professional coaching and training abilities, gives me the perspective needed to guide teams and Agile leaders to harness Agile as the competitive advantage weapon it was meant to be. I know the transformation path is rocky. As a former large-scale program manager and director of Project Management Offices, I have lived it myself. This makes me uniquely able to help others translate their existing world to the Agile world.

For the last five years, I have been coaching teams in the financial services industry and coaching coaches who represent the gamut of Agile implementations, from small consulting firms to the giants of industry. I believe that Agile is more than an alternate project management methodology and am passionate about deepening the roles in Agile – specifically Agile Coach and Agile Manager – to help Agile move into its fullest expression.

I hold an alphabet-soup of certifications: Certified Scrum Trainer (CST), Project Management Professional (PMP) and Six Sigma Green Belt (SSGB). I am also a professionally trained Co-Active Coach which gives me the skills to coach people one-on-one and in coaching circles.

Who else is here?



Teach the Roles

First, teach more than the do's and don'ts of the roles. Give people as aspirational vision of what their role IS when it is played out in its best expression.

What is an Agile Coach?

BULLDOZER

Shepherd

Servant Leader

Guardian of Quality and Performance



An agile coach is a...

- Bulldozer. Bulldozing impediments out of the team’s way.
- Shepherd. Guiding the team back to agile practices and principles when they stray.
- Servant leader. Serving the team rather than the team serving you.
- Guardian of quality and performance. Examining both what the team produces and how they produced it to make observations and help them tune the human system they are.

Source: The coach as bulldozer characteristic came from Mike Cohn’s Certified Scrum Master Workshop. The coach as sheepdog – protecting the flock from outside attackers is Ken Schwaber’s idea. This was the seed for Lyssa Adkins’ adaptation of it to shepherd, guiding the team back when they stray. Coach as servant leader was first coined by Mike Cohn and Ken Schwaber in the January 2003 Agile Times Newsletter article, “The Need for Agile Project Management.”

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BULLDOZER

Shepherd



Performance

Guardian of Quality and

Servant Leader

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The agile coach helps the team navigate unpredictable waters and adapt as things happen to them.

What is a Product Owner?

BUSINESS-VALUE-DRIVER

Vision Keeper

*Ultimately
Responsible*

**Daily
Decision
Maker**

Heat Shield



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To surface great product owners, first teach them to be these things for their teams:

- Business–Value–Driver. All decisions and tradeoffs, including when to stop the project, are made through considering which alternative gives the most business value now.
- Daily Decision Maker. Being fully present with the team to engage in conversation and make decisions as they arise so that the team moves forward unimpeded.
- Vision Keeper. Keeps the big picture of the product in the team’s sight and directs them toward it each sprint.
- Heat Shield. Protects the team from all outside noise and pressure, giving them focus.
- Single Throat to Choke. Being completely invested in the product. The team’s work is not just some assignment for you – it truly matters – so you graciously accept the burden of being the person answerable for the success of the product.

Let these phrases create a vision of great product ownership in the people you coach. Invite them to explore what these mean to them and where they feel comfort and discomfort with the role. Both comfort and discomfort signal growing edges for them and fertile places for you to coach.

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BUSINESS-VALUE-DRIVER

Daily Decision Maker



Ultimately Responsible

Heat Shield Vision Keeper

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The product owner is the one out in front. Leading and Protecting.

What is an Agile Manager?

Organizational Change Artist

TEAM CHAMPION

**Value
Maximizer**

Boundary Keeper

Lean Manager

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPEDIMENT REMOVER

An agile manager is an...

- Organizational Change Artist. Guiding an organization through Agile adoption (and re-adoption).
- Boundary Keeper. Reinforcing healthy boundaries both within the team and between the team and the greater organization..
- Value Maximizer. Managing the portfolio of projects like a product owner manages a portfolio of user stories. Always asking: what is the highest business value project now.
- Lean Manager. Using Lean thinking to improve organizational flow so that the value teams deliver can be realized without delay.
- Organizational Impediment Remover. Having the gritty courage it takes to remove entrenched impediments
- Team Champion. Coaching agile teams from the boundary of the team and activating them to reach their fullest potential by truly believing that they can.

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Organizational Change Artist

Boundary Keeper Value

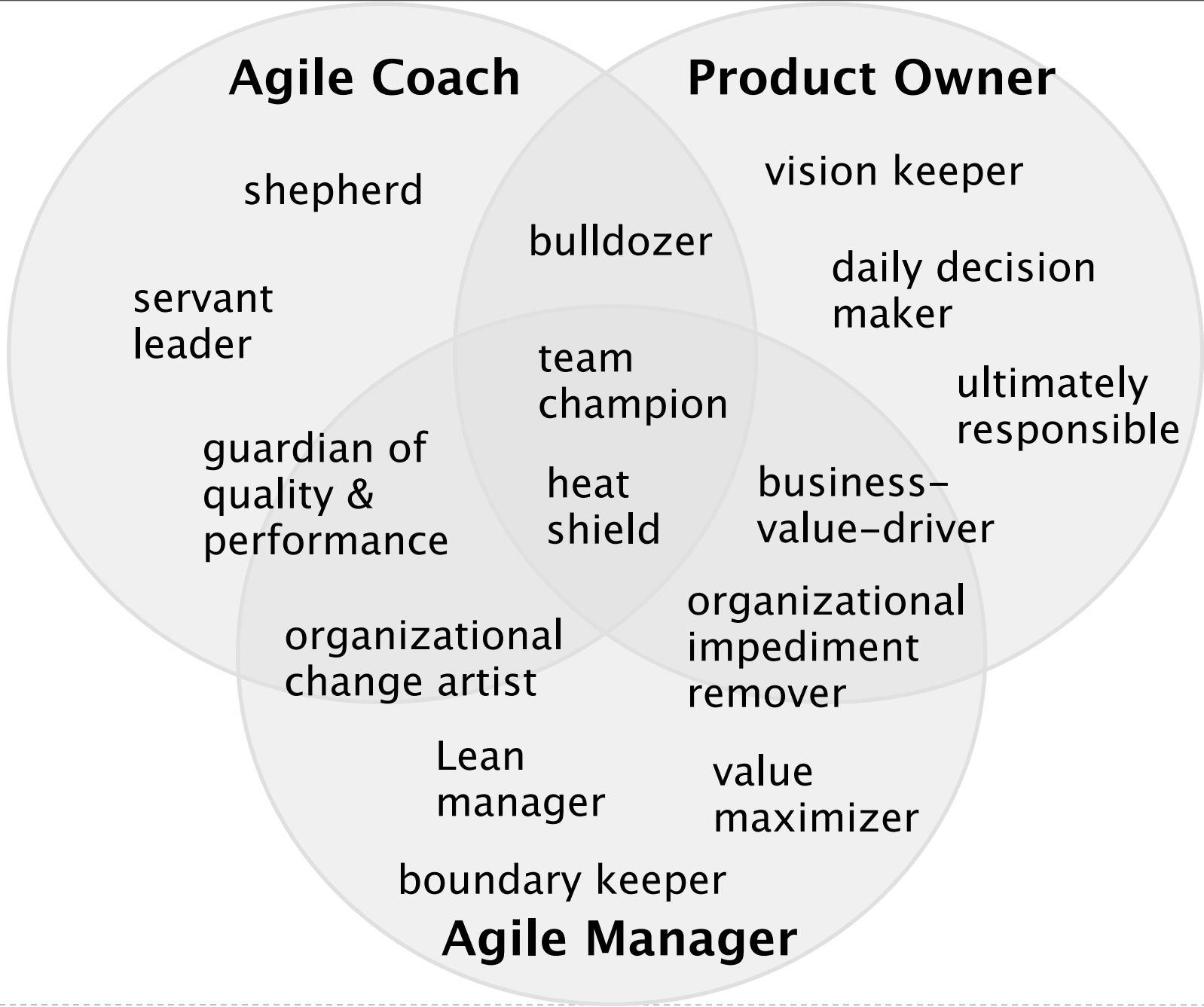


Maximizer Lean Manager

TEAM CHAMPION
REMOVER IMPEDIMENT

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The agile manager is like water – patiently, it can carve away the hardest surfaces and it will always find a way to make things flow.



Each of these roles is complete and strong in itself, but not one of them stands alone. It takes all three, operating well together, to give the organization a chance at unleashing Agile as a competitive advantage weapon.

Let’s take a gander at how they fit together.

The shepherd of the team and the team’s servant leader – these are fully inside the ScrumMaster role. The bulldozer – bulldozing impediments out of the team’s way. This is the ScrumMaster’s role, but often the activity of bulldozing takes two – a coach and a product owner – stronger together. Being the guardian of quality and performance. The ScrumMaster is fully focused on this from inside the team boundary. The agile manager brings a different perspective from their role as coach at team boundary. Both have observations to offer the team to help the them get better each time.

Now let’s look at the product owner. Vision keeper, daily decision maker – these are clearly in the domain of the product owner. Same thing with the one ultimately responsible. This is fully within the product owner’s role. Presumably, the product owner is someone who really cares about the product being developed, maybe even someone who will have to live what the team produces. That’s why they are the one ultimately responsible– they are the single person responsible the business results the product brings.

Where the product owner interlocks with the agile manager is in their shared focus on achieving business value. They are business value drivers, allowing business value to be the single standard by which progress is measured. They also they join forces to be organizational impediment removers, because organizational impediments are the big ones that restrict value delivery.

Although the product owner gets top billing for being the “heat shield” for the team, it takes the ScrumMaster, the product owner and the agile manager – all standing hip to hip – to create a shield big enough and thick enough to be effective.

Let’s turn to the agile manager now. The agile manager has full responsibility for being a value maximizer – maximizing value across projects – and a Lean manager – improving flow across processes. The agile manager is also a boundary keeper, ensuring healthy boundaries between the team, the ScrumMaster and the product owner as well as between the team and the wider organization. These three things are where the agile manager comes into full bloom.

And, while the agile manager is in the best position to be the organizational change artist, support from the ScrumMaster is essential. They work together to move the organization through the changes it will experience.

Finally, all three roles have an element of “team champion” in them. They must all, truly believe, that the team can do anything it bring its effort, intelligence and passion to. As team champion, all three roles look for ways to uphold the team and help them believe it, too.

Now you may argue with me about some of these. Maybe you think one of these characteristics belongs to all three or to different pair that I have shown here. Your experiences and perspectives are just as valid as mine, so I’ll ask that we not allow the debate about categorization to overshadow the main point. It’s this: the roles in agile are interlocking. They are supportive to one another sometimes, yin and yang in balance sometimes, and full of dynamic tension at other times. They are meant to be this way. It’s all for the sake of value delivery.

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Interlocking Roles in Agile

Find the “Interlocking Roles in Agile” video on YouTube by searching lyssaadkins.



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The material we just went through is available on YouTube. Feel free to use it as a training aid when you introduce or reinforce the Scrum roles.

This video introduces the term Agile Coach. For our purposes, Agile Coach equals Scrum Master. And Agile equals Scrum. This video also includes the Agile Manager role. This is not a recognized role in Scrum, although it certainly exists in most organizations in which Scrum is used.

Although The Team is a role in Scrum, it is not addressed in this video. Teams get how agile works and play their role well. It’s these “leadership” roles that require further definition and coaching before one gets good playing them.

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How am I doing?

The yardstick...



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► Highly-collaborative characteristics from Collaboration Explained, Jean Tabaka

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First we need the yardstick, something to measure yourself by. Here's one good one...the definition of highly collaborative and high performing teams.

Consider this...

How alive are these high performance characteristics in the team I coach? Alive n Kickin'? Alive? Mostly Dead? Dead Dead?

- They are **self-organizing** rather than role or title based
- They are **empowered** to make decisions
- They truly believe that, as a team, they **can solve any problem**
- They are committed to **team success** versus success at any cost
- The team **owns its decisions and commitments**
- **Trust**, versus fear or anger, motivates them
- They are **consensus-driven**, with full divergence and then convergence
- And they live in a world of constant **constructive disagreement**

Source: Collaboration Explained, Jean Tabaka

What is a ScrumMaster?

BULLDOZER

Shepherd

Servant Leader

Guardian of Quality and Performance

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Consider this...

Step 2: Take a moment to remember the best teacher you ever had. You know, the one who believed in you and expected a lot of you. Now, as that teacher, give yourself a letter grade for each of these characteristics:

Bulldozer. Bulldozing impediments out of the team's way.

Shepherd. Guiding the team back to agile practices and principles when they stray.

Servant leader. Serving the team rather than the team serving you.

Guardian of quality and performance. Examining both what the team produces and how they produced it to make observations and help them tune the human system they are.

An agile coach's value journal

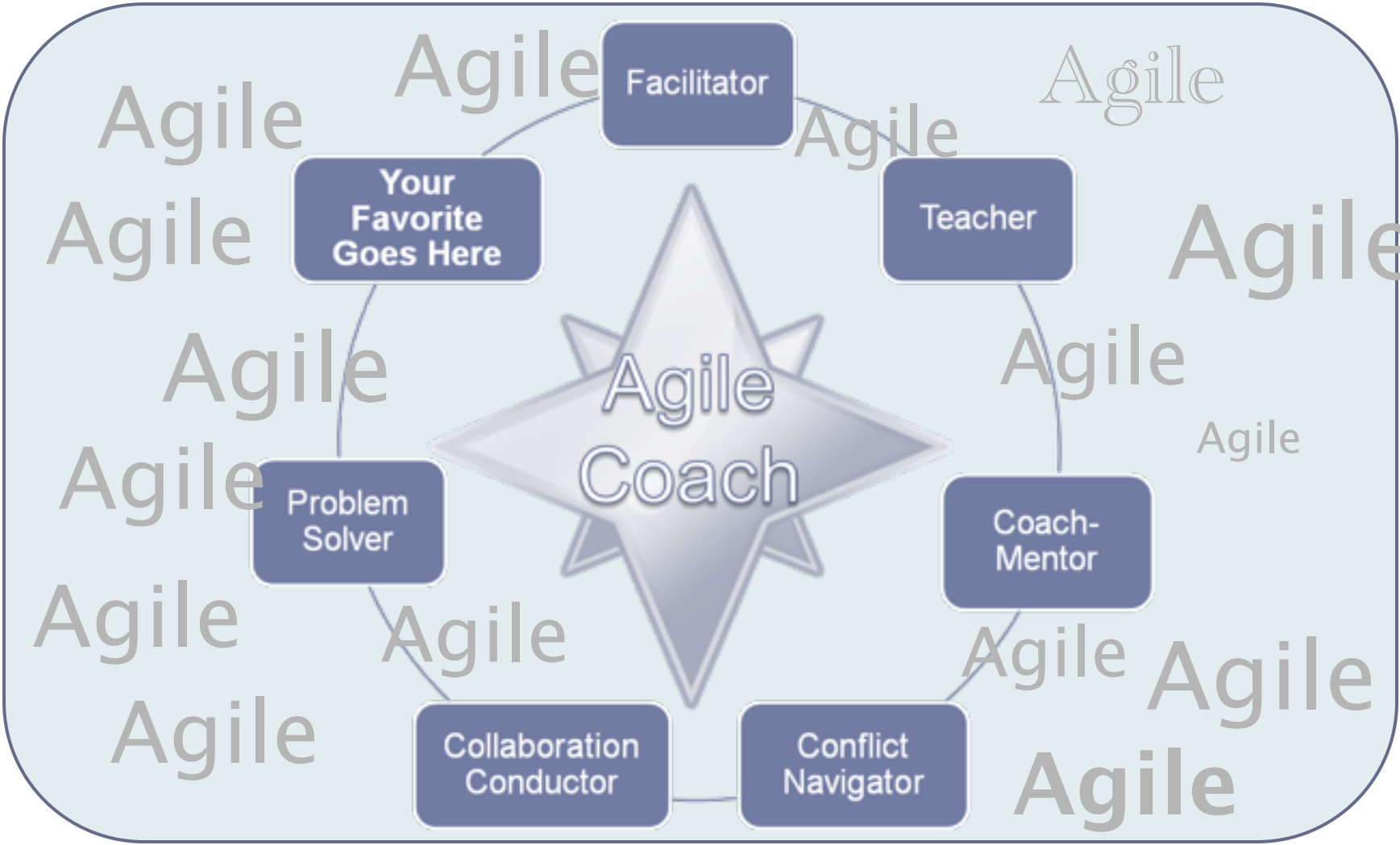
The value I delivered this week:

- Helped product owner get in synch with sponsor. She didn't see that she was giving the team direction separate from the vision!
- Started program-level spaghetti diagram of all the eps impacts from the Agile teams' deliveries. Everyone added to it and in one day we had a complete view. The program had been trying to get this view for over a month.
- Helped PMO director use agile teams' release plans to create her integrated "schedule". She won't be driving dates down to the teams anymore!
- Taught a product owner and apprentice agile coach how to get started creating a product backlog for a new endeavor. They're off and running now.
- Started up a new team. They got a good start.
- Convinced program-level change management team to work with the agile teams rather than sending "down" their list of deadlines. This is radical for them!
- Agile manager recognized (by herself) that she was being too directive. This coaching thing works!

Consider this...

Step 3: What does my value journal tell me? What? No value journal? Maybe think about starting one.

Bring in the allied disciplines



Agile coaching is...

40% doing
60% being

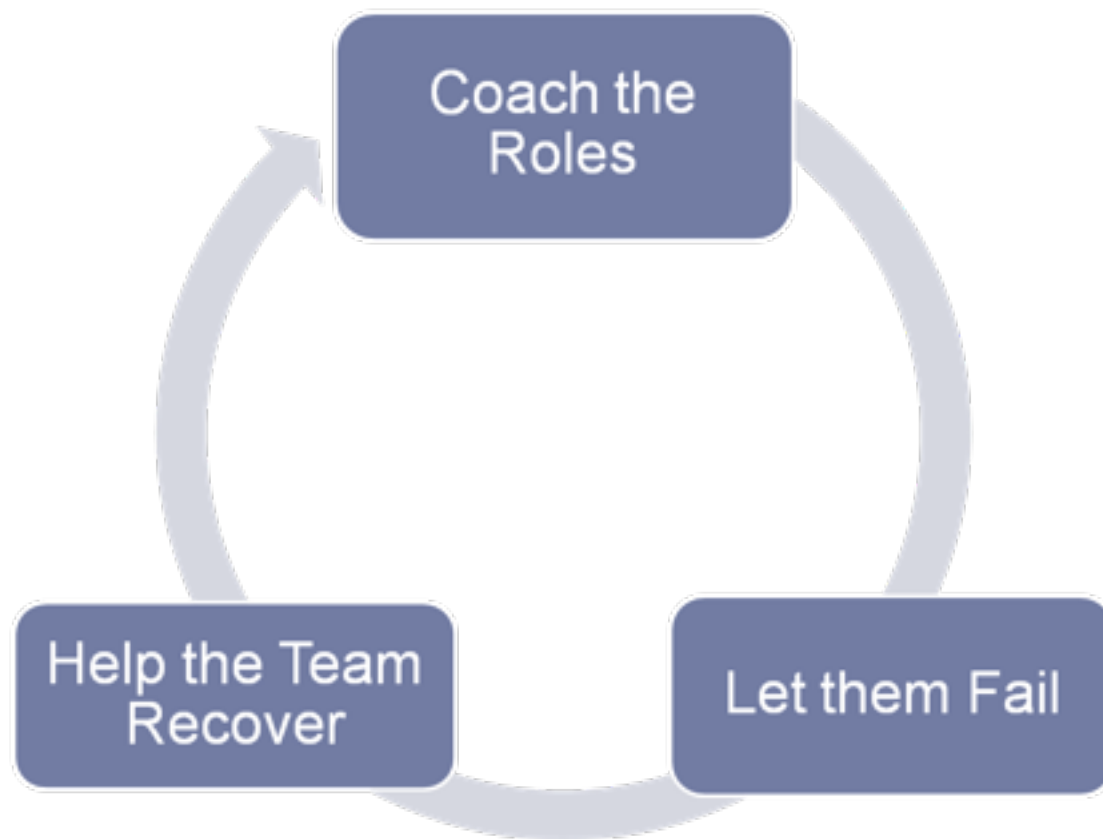
As an agile coach you model the key behaviors of a good agilist.

You ARE what you're trying to teach them to BE.



Coach the Roles

Helping people step fully into their role



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The goal of agile coaching is to forward the brilliant use of agile so that businesses achieve their goals faster and better. A separate, perhaps side goal is to increase the joy and accomplishment people feel in their work, which is where they spend most of their waking hours. To these ends, you coach to

- 1.help the organization achieve astonishing results, the kind that will matter to the business and the team members in a fundamental way
- 2.help the team develop and get healthier together (or recover more completely when not healthy)
- 3.help each person take the next step on their agile journey so they can be more successful and contribute in a way that feeds team improvement and their own growth

When you coach people to take up their agile role fully, you are squarely focused on the 3rd coaching objective which impacts the other two.

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When is the best time to coach people?

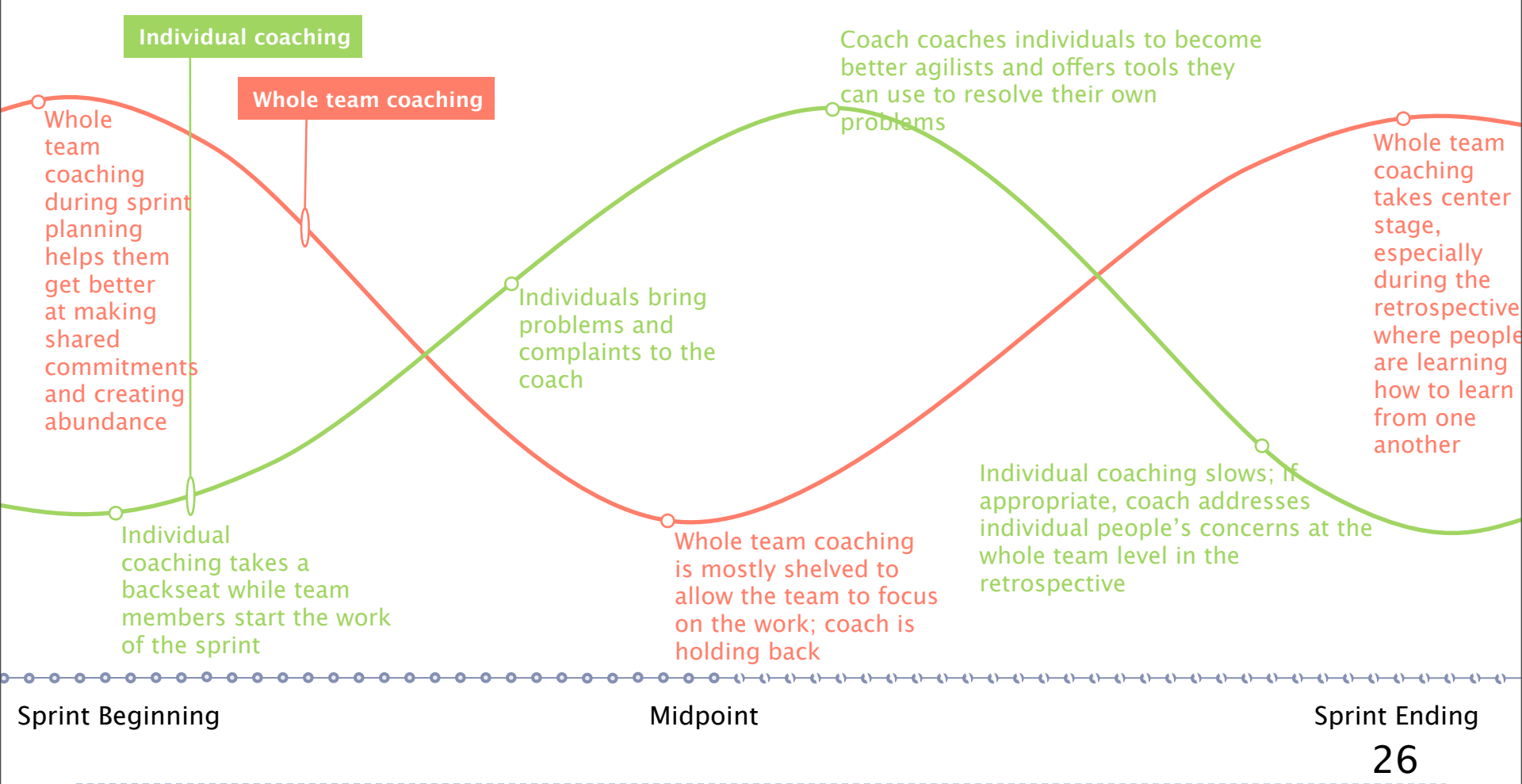


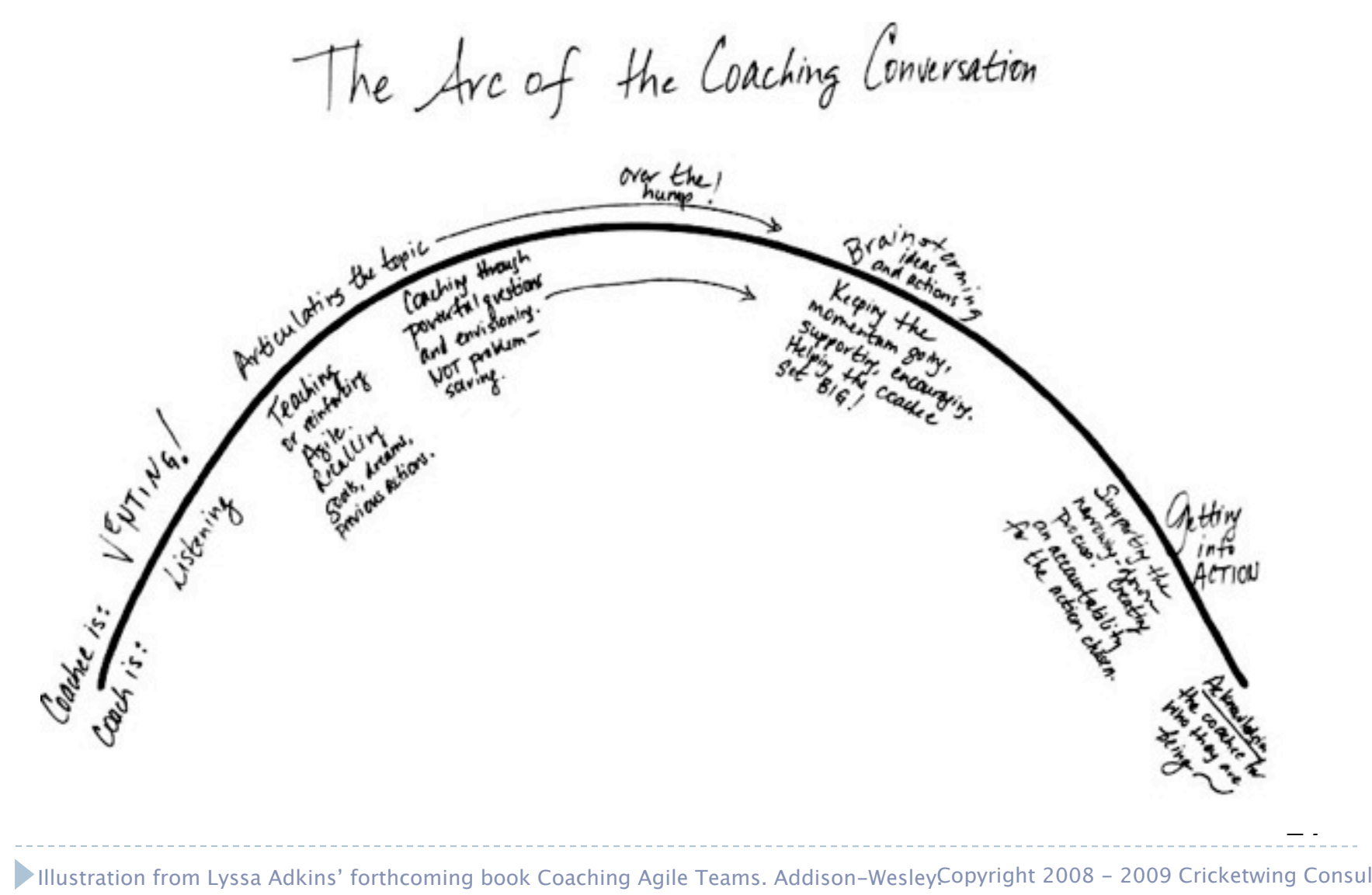
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This is the balance to strike: coach individuals and teams at the same time, while paying attention to when each type of coaching is most impactful and least disruptive. A good agile coach pays attention to where the team is in the sprint and release cycle to make whole team and individual coaching useful, powerful and non-disruptive.

Notice that agile coaches are not professional coaches in the same way work/life or executive coaches are professionals because we don't hold the client's agenda as the single guiding light. When we coach in the agile context, we uphold agile first and coach second. Our agile agenda interplays with our coachee's personal agenda.

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How does a coaching conversation flow?



Beginning. Whether the coach or the coachee opens the conversation, the beginning is much the same. In the beginning, there is venting. The coachee needs to get something (or many things) off his chest and he needs to be heard. The coach is fully listening and is totally present.

The venting wears itself out (or the coach offers a timebox to finish it up if it seems that it may go on forever). The real reason the coachee is in the conversation starts to emerge. The coach checks-in with the coachee about the topic ("Did I hear that right?") as they move into conversation centered on the topic. This is often the time to reinforce something about agile – perhaps a practice, value, or role characteristic – that may address the topic.

Middle: You are getting close to the midpoint, and getting over the "hump" of the conversation, when the coachee starts to climb out of the dead-endedness of the topic.

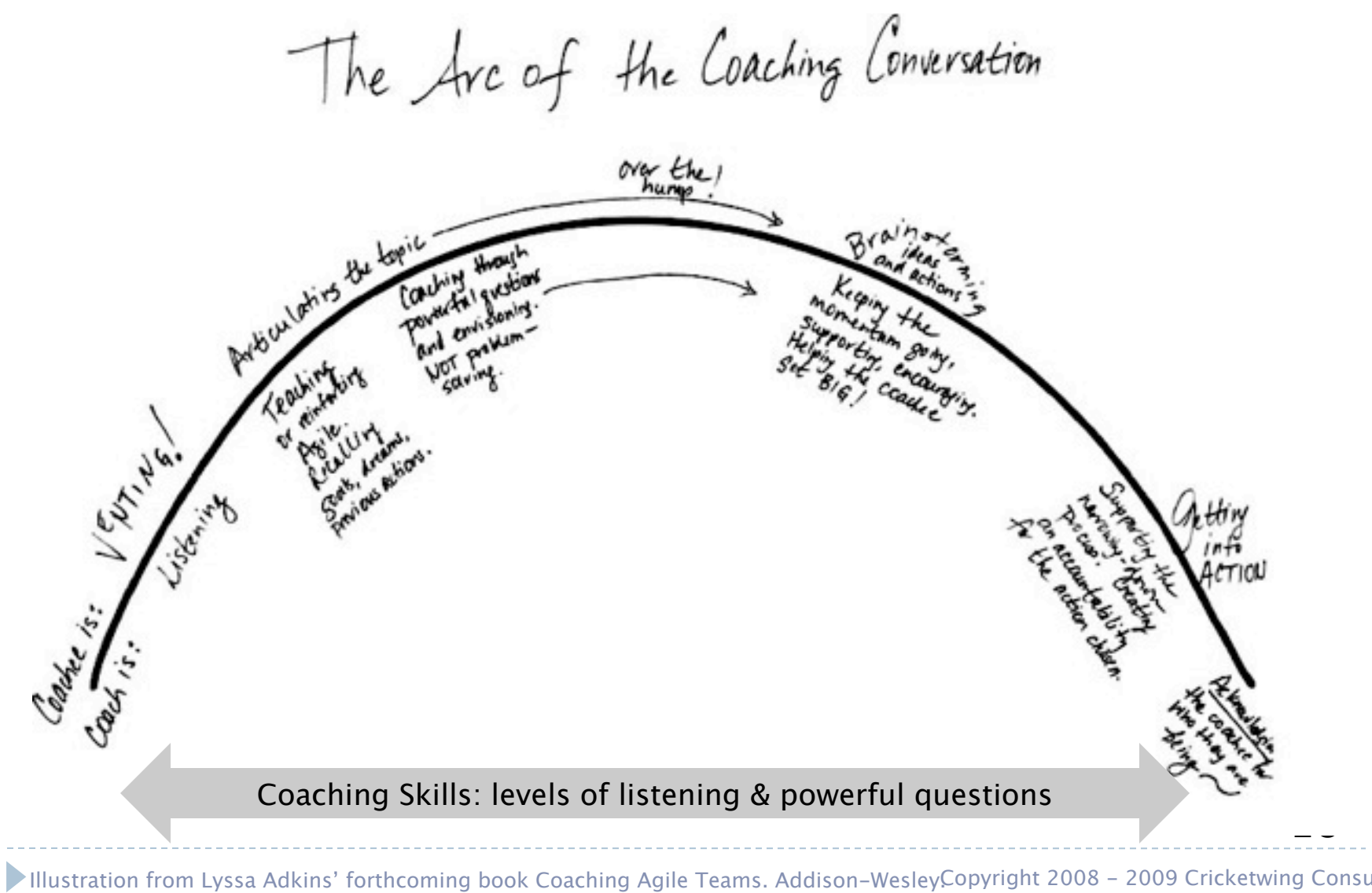
This happens because the coach asks powerful questions that invite introspection. Perhaps the coach has taken the coachee on an imaginary trip into the future where the topic is already solved perfectly. From these places of possibility, the coachee can see his own solutions. He arrives at the midpoint of the conversation with a resounding: "It's not hopeless after all!"

Perhaps he sees new ways to address the topic, perhaps he sees something within himself that is holding him back, or perhaps he feels renewed just having shared something deep and bothersome.

Next, the coachee starts looking for specific solutions. Coach and coachee may brainstorm together while the coach encourages and supports the process. Oftentimes, supporting the process means giving the coachee room to be big, wild, unbridled in brainstorming possible actions. This means the coach may also need to get big, wild and unbridled. Note something the coach is specifically not doing during the conversation: problem solving. If you do offer solution options, it's only to keep the coachee's juices flowing. You could care less whether the coachee chooses "your" option because you know it has to be something he will act on from deep within.

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Skills for the coaching conversation



Ending. You can feel the conversation coming to a close when the coachee starts narrowing down to a few specific actions to take. Let it close at this time. Even if a new topic arises, don't pursue it. Let the coachee move forward on what he has already decided to do. If the other topic is important, it will come back.

Once the coachee has chosen the action to take, the coach supports the coachee by setting up an accountability around that action. The accountability can be either explicit or soft. An explicit accountability is an agreement the coachee makes about when the action will be done and how he will let the coach know. It's the coachee's job to move forward with the action, not the coach's job to "make" him do it so the coachee should not be pressured into making an explicit accountability.

The accountability can also be soft, such as the coach asking, "May I check in with you in five days to see what has happened?" This is often more comfortable in a business context because people aren't accustomed to being "pinned down." (Quite a commentary on the weak state of personal accountability in the workplace, isn't it?)

As you repeatedly coach someone, without forcing, move from soft accountabilities to explicit accountabilities. This will ratchet up the coachees ability to be accountable which is an essential agile skill.

Did you notice two specific coaching skills called out in the description of the arc of the conversation? They're levels of listening and powerful questions.

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Some Essential Skills for Coaching

In the coaching conversation, find out
what they want, help them see it and
help them see how to get it.



Levels of Listening

- ▶ **Level I – Internal Listening**

- ▶ It's all about me, me, me, me, me, me, me

- ▶ **Level II – Focused Listening**

- ▶ Hard-wired connection

- ▶ **Level III – Global Listening**

- ▶ Everything in the environment is used including your intuition

What a rare gift to be truly listened to. An agile coach knows this and capitalizes on it for the sake of each person's full contribution to the team and, by extension, the products the team creates. Fully listening is a skill one develops, it takes practice. One good framework that helps coaches develop this skill is Levels of Listening from the school of co-active coaching.

Level I – Internal Listening. When the coach listens at Level I, it's all about the coach. The coach hears the speaker's words and may be very attentive but the words are interpreted through the coach's own lens. Everything the speaker says is met with some version of this thought in the coach's head: How does this affect me?

Level II – Focused Listening. When listening at Level II, there is a hard-wired connection between the coach and the speaker. The coach is "over there" in the speaker's chair – intently focused on what the speaker is saying. Freed from the personal lens, the coach listens and responds in the moment with the questions and silences that help the speaker move through whatever they are expressing.

Level III – Global Listening. Everything in the environment is at the coach's disposal when listening at Level III. The speaker's tone of voice, posture, changes in room temperature, what noises are happening around them – all of these things are noticed and used by the coach. The hard-wired connection is still there, joined by the coach's antennae that pick up everything. This is the place where intuition lives. Coach blurs the intuition. It doesn't matter if the intuition is "right" as long as the coach does not become attached to it.

A way to increase the amount of time you spend in Level II and Level III listening is to enter each conversation with a fresh mind. Remind yourself that you truly don't know what the person is going to say next. So, be on the edge of your seat

References

Whitworth, Laura, Kimsey-House, Karen, Kimsey-House, Henry and Sandahl, Philip. Co-Active Coaching 2nd Edition: New Skills for Coaching People Toward Success in Work and Life. 2007. Davies-Black Publishing.

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Powerful Questions

Powerful Questions are powerful because ...

- ▶ They are truly open.
- ▶ They are not asked with a “correct” answer in mind.
- ▶ They invite introspection.
- ▶ They may present additional solutions.
- ▶ They almost always lead to greater creativity and insight.
- ▶ Most importantly, a powerful question will send people into the realm of discovery.

Let's try our hand at using powerful questions in some typical agile coaching scenarios.

References

Whitworth, Laura, Kimsey-House, Karen, Kimsey-House, Henry and Sandahl, Philip. Co-Active Coaching 2nd Edition: New Skills for Coaching People Toward Success in Work and Life. 2007. Davies-Black Publishing.

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Starting to Coach

Set it up so coaching will happen

- ▶ Start one-on-one coaching conversations when nothing is wrong
- ▶ Create a base for coaching
 - ▶ Set their sights on high performance
 - ▶ Give them the learning they need to be self-organizing and cross-functional
 - ▶ Help them discover their intrinsic motivators: shared vision through goals at multiple levels

All this establishes a foundation for continuous improvement – right from the beginning

Agile Coach Failure Modes

Agile coach failure modes



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Agile coach failure modes explained

▶ The Spy

The Spy spends just enough time observing the team to pick up topics for the next retrospective.

▶ The Seagull

The Seagull swoops in at standups, poops all over the team (with well-intentioned observations or advice) and flies away again.

▶ The Opinionator

The Opinionator expresses opinions during team discussions, getting so attached to their opinions (or others') that they lose the objectivity needed to help the team have great discussions.

Ask yourself this: Which ones of these have been in play for me? How?
Jot down some thoughts.

Agile coach failure modes explained

► The Admin

The Admin undermines team ownership by becoming an unnecessary middle-man for meeting logistics, access requests and other administrator-type jobs.

► The Hub

The Hub acts as the center of the universe for communication between team members and for task-level coordination.

Ask yourself this: Which ones of these have been in play for me? How?
Jot down some thoughts.

Agile coach failure modes explained

▶ The Butterfly

The Butterfly flits around from team to team, landing just long enough to impart a pearl of wisdom or pose a philosophical question.

▶ The Expert

The Expert is so involved in the details of the team's work that only the trees are visible. What? We're in a forest? Huh, does that mean there's a way out?

▶ The Nag

Helpfully "reminds" the team to start standup, update the story board, complete the tasks they committed to, etc.

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Ask yourself this: Which ones of these have been in play for me? How?
Jot down some thoughts.

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The effect

The failure modes sap the team's ability to become truly high performing.

When the failure modes are in operation, the coach has somehow become a focus of the team's work.

Maybe the coach is too invasive, like the Hub, for instance. Or, equally as damaging, the coach could be too evasive, like the Butterfly. In either case, the coach is in the center and that's the wrong place for a coach to be.

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What to do?

Where do they come from?

- ▶ Ego
- ▶ Continuous Partial Attention

Fear

What might you do?

- ▶ Replace Fear with Trust
- ▶ Trust + Attention = Good Coaching
- ▶ Cultivate mindfulness
- ▶ Get curious
- ▶ Go easy
- ▶ Pair



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Agile Coach Success Modes

Agile coach success modes



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Reference: This material may be included in the forthcoming book by Lyssa Adkins, "Coaching Agile Teams: A Companion for Scrum Masters, Agile Coaches and Project Managers in Transition." ISBN: 0321637704. Copyright 2008–2009 Lyssa Adkins. All rights reserved. DO NOT QUOTE OR FORWARD.

Agile coach success modes explained

▶ The Magician

The Magician asks questions that – voila! – reveal what is there but could not be seen.

▶ The Child

The Child genuinely wonders “why?” and is propelled by an insatiable curiosity about life and everything in it.

▶ The Ear

The Ear hears everything and gives people room to grow by not responding to everything.

Which ones of these will you try? When? Play out the scenario in your head. Jot down some notes about it.

Agile coach success modes explained

- ▶ **The Heckler**

The Heckler keeps it fun and light and just a little off balance to jolt people out of complacency.

- ▶ **The Wise Fool**

The Wise Fool asks the dumb questions that enlighten.

- ▶ **The Creeping Vine**

The Creeping Vine makes small moves, imperceptible to the team, that relentlessly pull them back to the core of agile bit by bit.

Which ones of these will you try? When? Play out the scenario in your head. Jot down some notes about it.

Agile coach success modes explained

▶ The Dreamer

The Dreamer bravely gives voice to possible futures waiting to be created.

▶ The Megaphone

The Megaphone makes sure all voices are heard especially the voices of the oppressed.

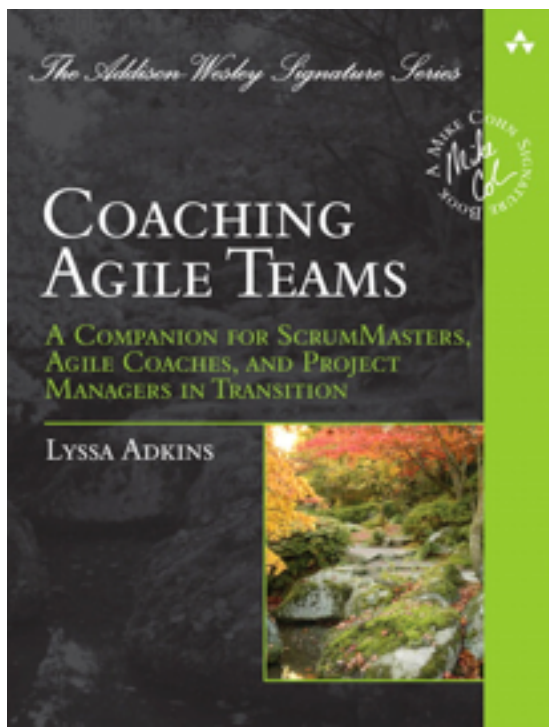
Which ones of these will you try? When? Play out the scenario in your head. Jot down some notes about it.

I will _____ so that _____.





Use this page to record any ideas you have about things you’re learning, things you may want to change or explore.



Get your own coach and look for the book.

CoachingAgileTeams.com

Agile founding father, Jim Highsmith says:

*"I am an enthusiastic champion of this book.
It goes on the bookshelf as one of my top ten
agile books."*

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Please contact me with questions or to talk about coaching or training. I am looking for a few one-on-one coaching clients and a new Coaching Circle starts up soon. Are you my ideal coaching client? I'd like to find out. Would you?

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