

## Benjamin Day

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Benjamin Day Consulting



PLURALSIGHT

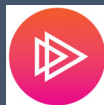


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Azure DevOps Services Fundamentals

Azure DevOps Server 2020  
Fundamentals

Scrum Master Skills



PLURALSIGHT

On with the show.

I have too much I want to cover.

1. Leader vs Boss
2. Hero dysfunction
3. Linguistic frames
4. Words with forward motion
5. Fear of loss
6. Avoiding blame
7. Getting projects back on track
8. Vulnerability & Empathy
9. Leading through change & uncertainty
10. Get feedback early and often
11. Write for a non-tech audience / Avoid tech centric communication
12. Leading self-organizing teams / cultivating self-organizing teams
13. Prioritization
14. Predicting the future
15. Solving problems using "we" vs "you"
16. When stuff gets tense, slow down



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My Goal:  
Help you improve how you  
lead and communicate

The big trick as a leader is  
convincing people to follow you

Choose your words.

## What's Leadership?

Strategic Direction

Inspire  
Teams / Org

Make Sure Stuff  
Works Smoothly



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Leadership is  
about scaling.

### Large organization:

- You set the direction
- You probably don't do any of the work
- Lots of delegation to employees

### Small team:

- Difference between "direction" and "implementation" is minimal
- Probably delegating to teammates rather than employees

Large org: Inspire

Small team: "Just do it"



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I struggle with  
'hero dysfunction'.

→ <http://www.pluralsight.com/courses/scrum-master-skills>

Too much telling.  
Too much doing.

Not enough asking.  
Not enough delegation.

## Degrees of Control & Detail

### Small Team

Lots of control  
You can micromanage if you want to  
Hero-mode is an option  
Frustration →  
"Do it my way. Oh whatever.  
I'll do it myself!"  
Command & control is an option

### Large Organization

Can't get too specific  
Micromanage →  
Lose the big picture  
Micromanage →  
You're a "bottleneck"  
Micromanage →  
is your larger strategy any good?  
Have to rely on trust, self-organization, &  
intrinsic motivation



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Are you a  
'leader' or a 'boss'?

“Leadership” through fear is unsustainable.

“Leadership”  
by Fear

Fear wears off

- It doesn't scale

Stress takes a while to clear

- Not good for productivity

“Get this done or you're fired.”

- Unrealistic
- Not good for employee retention
- Us vs. Them

You get trash talked when you leave the room





"Don't confuse aggression with strength."

Peggy Noonan, Wall Street Journal



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"If the facts are on your side, pound the facts into the table.

If the law is on your side, pound the law into the table.

If neither the facts nor the law are on your side, *pound the table.*"



Alan Dershowitz, Harvard Law School  
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If someone loses their cool,  
it's usually a sign of  
weakness.

Leadership  
by Inspiration

Self-organization is key to scaling  
Find ways to get people to feel good  
about themselves and their work  
Get them to WANT to do a good job

Make it ok for you to be wrong  
Learn how to listen  
Learn how to connect with people



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My big fear:  
I think I'm right and everyone knows that I'm  
wrong...but isn't telling me.

I strive for open, honest, respectful and  
bi-directional communication.

People are skeptical.  
In the tech world, that's probably  
well-deserved.

You need to try to create trust.

You need to make it  
ok to be “wrong”.

You need to make it ok for your teams  
to tell you that *you* are wrong.

Suggestion:  
"If we wanted to ruin this project,  
what would we do?"

Suggestion:  
"How will we know if we've failed?"

Suggestion:  
“How will we know if we’ve succeeded?”

I want people to *want* to follow me.  
I want people to trust me and my team.

# Linguistic Frames

The words around the words.



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On the count of 3...



Don't think of an elephant.



"I'm not a crook."

Richard M. Nixon  
November 17, 1973

<https://www.nixonfoundation.org/artifact/official-presidential-portrait/>

## Linguistic Frames

"Frames are mental structures that shape the way we see the world. ... You can't see or hear frames. They are part of what...cognitive scientists call the 'cognitive unconscious'."

*George Lakoff,  
"The ALL NEW Don't Think of an Elephant!"*



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## Use Frames to Improve Your Communication & Leadership

Know what you believe  
Know why you believe it  
What is the goal?

The words will follow

Use this to lead



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## Choose words with motion

Forward motion rather than backward motion



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It's easy to say what NOT to do.

"Well, I told you not to do that."

It's easy to say  
what NOT to do.

You can always pull an "I told you so"

Suggesting something...

- ...requires actually HAVING an idea
- ...riskier
- ...requires courage

Courage to be wrong

Courage to be embarrassed

Courage to lead



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Phrases that  
never work.

"Don't be nervous"

"Don't worry"

"Don't flip out"

"Don't get upset"

"Don't whine"

"Don't cry"



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Phrases that  
~~sometimes work~~  
work better

"There's no need to X because..."

"It's understandable that you might be feeling Y..."

Acknowledge the emotion...

...then work on disarming the situation



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Talk about what you want people to do rather  
than what you don't want people to do.

# Uncertainty & Loss



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Humans have a fear of loss.

If they're going to get 98% 'awesome',  
they'll tend to focus on the  
2% 'non-awesome'.

Software is not a 'sure thing.'



Wishing does not make it so.

Gripping tighter also does not  
make it so.

Software always gets more  
complex once you start.

How do you walk your  
bosses, customers, and stakeholders  
through uncertainty?

## Leading through uncertainty in IT

Be transparent  
Change is going to happen  
Complexities and setbacks will arise

Beware of the temptation to look for  
more accurate estimates!



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Making your teams spend extra time on  
'more accurate planning' is  
usually wasteful.

"When are we  
going to get our  
stuff?"

"Forecast" vs "commitment"

No such thing as a "weather committer"

"Forecast" has the linguistic frame of  
uncertainty baked in



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Scrum tip for  
"When are we  
going to get our  
stuff?"

Create a product backlog

- Transparent
- Readable to non-tech people

Top of the backlog should be...

- ...well-understood
- ...estimated

Start tracking your team's velocity



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I wanted to say:  
“velocity is not perfect”.

The positive frame:  
“velocity gives us empirical evidence of what our team can deliver and helps us to provide a data-driven estimate for feature delivery.”

Want to learn to predict the future?

→ <http://www.pluralsight.com/courses/scrum-master-skills>

# Leading through change

Process improvements?



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Focus on what will stay the same.

Focus on  
what you gain  
rather than  
what you lose.

Focus on 'Done Software'.

"We're going to get  
done software more often."

Change is a feature  
not a bug.



It's a chance to adapt.  
You get 'done' software and if you don't like it,  
you can change it.

It's not "rework."

Positive frame:  
It's improving existing features  
to better meet the needs of the stakeholders.

It's never "rework"

"The team didn't get that requirement right"

"Oh...I want that button to be pink."

Vagueness in requirements != "rework"

"Rework" nukes your prioritized backlogs

"Does this deliver business value?"

"Can you live with this for a while? Or would you prefer we not ship this?"

"That's good feedback. Let's create a new PBI to change that to be pink."



Positive frame:  
Delivering business value through  
done, working software.

# Prioritization

Setting your teams up to succeed



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You have a priority in your head.  
Share that vision.

It's easy to say that everything is a top priority.  
"Just get it done."

"Everything is a  
top priority."

Everything has a priority.  
Everything might be "on fire"...  
...but there is a priority

This is a lack of courage to make a  
decision about priority.

"Just get it all done" is a failure of  
leadership.



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Your people need known, transparent  
priorities in order to be successful.

*(This is the 'secret sauce' for being  
a great Scrum Product Owner, btw.)*

Priorities say what you're  
going to do.

Talking priorities  
with your team

Talk about what is important...

- ...to you
- ...to the business
- ...to your organization

Why is xyz a priority?

Why do you think that xyz is a priority?



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Know your  
corporate goals  
→ priorities

What does the business need?  
What is the business trying to do?

How do your priorities align with those goals?

How do the features you're asking for align to those priorities?

If everything explodes, what do we do first?



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Ask people about  
your priorities.

Find out if you're wrong  
Ask them to poke holes in your plans  
"What am I missing?"  
"How will we know if we're succeeding?"  
"How will we know if we're failing?"



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# A project is going off the rails...

What do you do?



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## Turn a troubled project around.



Communication  
when things  
aren't going well

Temptation to hide  
Temptation to avoid transparency  
  
Talk about what you're going to do



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Things to try  
when you need  
to turn around a  
troubled project

Create a written Definition of Done  
Do less work

- Minimize work in progress
- Do less at once

Hold your team to account for delivery

- DO NOT hold individuals to account

Measure how much the team can achieve in a given period of time

- Velocity



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Things to try  
when you need  
to turn around a  
troubled project

Include QA testers to your Sprint  
Planning meetings

Start writing unit tests

Minimize integration and deployment  
distractions

- Create automated builds
- Create automated releases
- Azure DevOps? GitHub Actions?



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Give status  
updates

Focus on

- what the teams have achieved
- risks that have been addressed

Talk about

- what you need to be successful
- new problems you've discovered

DO NOT dwell on what didn't happen

Let your stakeholders know...

- ...that you're **ACTUALLY** working on stuff
- ...that you're competent and you care
- ...that your job is *HARD*



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### Give status updates

Positive frame:

"In this sprint, the team delivered 3 product backlog items to done."

Negative frame:

"The team mostly got everything done that we wanted except for 2 PBIs."

If you use the negative frame, the stakeholders will focus on what they DIDN'T get



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### Tips for Sprint Review meetings

Only show PBIs that made it to Definition of Done (DoD)

Partially done? Don't show it.

- Distracting
- Confusing to stakeholders



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Remember the  
purpose of the  
Sprint Review!!

Gather feedback from stakeholders

Feedback on the state of the product  
- Including what got to done in this sprint

Feedback on the product backlog  
- Feedback on where the product is going



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# Trust

...and what do you do when you don't trust your teams?



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When you don't  
trust your teams...

Managers tend to "clamp down"

- Command & Control
- Heavier process

You tend to measure their failure rather  
than assisting their success

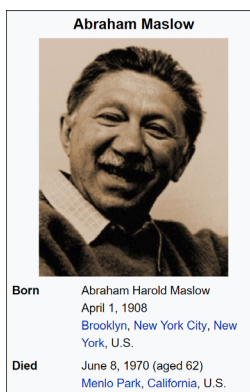
Time wasted assigning blame

You're afraid your not going to get your  
"needs" met

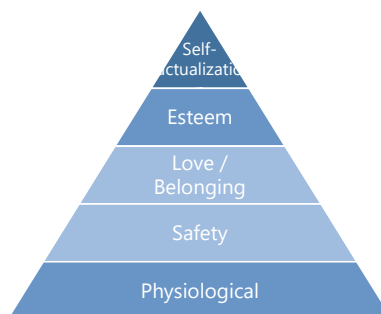


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## Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow%27s\\_hierarchy\\_of\\_needs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow%27s_hierarchy_of_needs)



Become all you can be

Recognition, Status, Respect

Friendships, Family, Intimacy

Security (Personal, Financial), Health

Food, Water, Air, Sleep, Shelter, etc.



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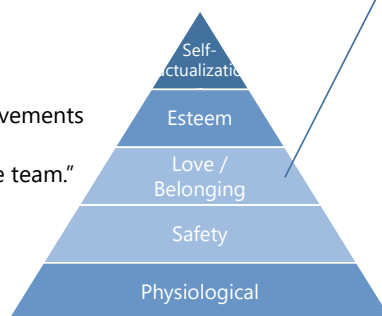
## Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Room to grow & be awesome

Recognition for the work / achievements

"I want to feel like I'm part of the team."

"I need this job."



Lack of this correlates with loneliness, depression, and anxiety

Become all you can be

Recognition, Status, Respect

Friendships, Family, Intimacy

Security (Personal, Financial), Health

Food, Water, Air, Sleep, Shelter, etc.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow%27s\\_hierarchy\\_of\\_needs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow%27s_hierarchy_of_needs)



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## How to use Agile

### Wrong Way

Find out how much my team sucks

Measuring how much they disappoint you

### Right Way

Help them to not suck

Help them to be transparent about status/progress

Help them (and you) to get clarity on what "done" means

Focus on doing the right things



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You are not  
there to  
drive the  
team.

Think of it as  
leading them  
towards  
success.



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Any last questions?

Thank you.



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