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Coaches Values and Principles

Since so much of Agile and Lean operates through values and principles it is clear there are also values and principles that can be applied to Coaching. The following values and principles reflect my view of “good” Coaching.

Values

- Start with “why”: At all levels, at all times, the first thing coaches should provide is an understanding of “why” a particular practice, principle, or value makes sense and how it is applied successfully to the organization.
- Respect what has already been accomplished and the people that have done it: Most organizations that want to increase their Agility are already successful, and have been made that way by the people of the organizations. Coaching should leverage this success and to offer up improvements, not wholesale replacement, of what made the organization and its people successful in the first place. Coaching should be done with humility.
- Skin in the game: Coaches should have a stake in the success of the coaching work based on the impact to the organization and people being coached.
- Work ourselves out of a job: In other words, our primary goal is to “Teach an organization to fish”, to coach the internal coaches, to train the internal trainers, and to ensure that people can use value, principles and practices to improve without outside intervention.
- Go to the “Gemba”: Work hard to understand issues, problems, successes, etc. by working directly with the people in their place of work, rather through reports, metrics, etc.
- Be the change: Adopt Lean and Agile values, principles, and practices. Lead by example and, in particular, be a servant leader. Work the change using iterative and incremental approaches, leveraging the Plan - Do - Check - Act (PDCA) cycle.
- You cannot change more than your customer wants to change: The limiting factor on change in an organization is willingness of the organization and its people to absorb and thrive on change. Coaching is not about forcing organizations to change; its about continuous, relentless improvement.

Principles

John Wooden (coach UCLA men’s basketball team) is widely considered one of the greatest coaches in the history of sports. He lays out five basic principles of coaching which can easily be applied to our world

- Industriousness: All new skills, and all new skills require work.
- Enthusiasm: When your heart is in your work, and you’re excited about a new way of doing things, it rubs off on everyone around you.
- Condition: Agile works when every team member is good at what he or she does.
- Fundamentals: Wooden writes, “the finest system cannot overcome poor execution of the

fundamentals. The coach must be certain that he never permits himself to get 'carried away' by a complicated system" — and this is especially relevant for an agile coach.

- Development of team spirit: Self-organization, whole team, energized work, and empowering the team. From Wooden "The coach must use every bit of psychology at his command and use every available method to develop a fine team spirit on his squad. Teamwork and unselfishness must be encouraged at every opportunity, and each [team member] must be eager, not just willing, to sacrifice personal glory for the welfare of the team. Selfishness, envy, egotism, and criticism of each other can crush team spirit and ruin the potential of any team. The coach must be aware of this and constantly alert to prevent such traits by catching them at the source before trouble develops."

What Does a Lean-Agile Coach Do?

Coaching is a mix of:

- Growing skills, knowledge, and confidence using just-in-time teaching within the organization's context
- Preparing people for ceremonies, meetings, etc.
- Practicing skills side-by-side (as appropriate)
- Providing fast feedback and facilitating change
- Providing training to fill gaps in knowledge
- Facilitation to improve information sharing and decision making

A coach must be prepared to:

- Coach: At an individual level and at a team level. Help teams and individuals to achieve high performance by embracing Lean-Agile mindset and practices.
- Teach or Train: Coaches provide formal and one-on-one agile training to any member of a delivery team. They craft industry knowledge to the context of an organization and Team. They promote collaboration for diversity in thinking.
- Mentor: Coaches share previous professional experience in context and help people in the organization develop the skills. The work to train internal Trainers and coach internal Coaches.
- Facilitate: Guide the teams and individuals through ceremonies. Usually low touch, letting them go through the works.

Coaching Cycle

Typical cycle of an Agile coach is 3-18 months. The first three months are high engagement and last three are more ad-hoc engagement - high engagement for a specific issue, but much less continuous engagement. Coaches start a client with a high engagement which tapers off as they take more responsibility for their learning.

Coaches walk people and organizations through the:

- Peak of expectation
- Trough of disillusionment

- Slope of enlightenment
- Outcome of enhanced productivity

What is the Outcome of Coaching from Coaches Perspective?

To be “out of the job” while the organization and people that have been coached can take full responsibility for their improvement. And to be a trusted advisor, for when issues come up in the future.

What We Don't Want to See

What does a coach not do?

- A coach doesn't solve problems, but rather helps the Team how they will solve the problem.
- The coach does not act as “staff augmentation.” For example, while a coach may help out in many ways as part of being a servant leader, the coach doesn't act as a secretary setting up meetings for the teams, or running team ceremonies etc.
- A coach does not take ownership of project deliverables. The Team stays accountable and responsible for meeting goals and objectives.
- A coach works him/her-self out of a job. In particular there is not room for a “If you are not part of the solution there is plenty of money to be made in prolonging the problem” attitude. If you are not helping you should stop or help find someone who can help.
- Before a coach even gets started with an engagement they need to be sure they can help, or walk away from the business.
- A coach does not respond to questions with “it depends”. Coaches state approach(es) as well as pros and cons of these approaches in the context of the organization and then ensure that any decisions are made by the people involved (not the coach).

Want to Know More?

- [How Much Coaching Do We Really Need?](#)
- [What are the Characteristics of a Great Coach](#)
- [What Kind of Questions Should We Ask If We Are Hiring a Coach?](#)
- [FiveWhyz Coaching Values](#)

[Learning, Reference, Coaching, Values, Principles](#)

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