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What Are The Characteristics of a Great Agile Coach?

There are three basic ideas that should be considered when thinking about the characteristics that makes a great Agile Coach:

1. They are the embodiment of [Agile Values and Principles](#). The Agile Coach has to be seen to living the [values and principles](#), not just professionally but personally as well.
2. They are coaches, and so reflect general notions and professional values that all coaches have. This means that, for example, the Agile Coach takes an interest in developing their professional skills through organizations such as [Agile Coaching Institute](#).
3. They are able to work with Teams themselves, and so often start out as a Scrum Master. This is not a surprise as the Scrum Master is considered a Coach of the Team. An Agile Coach will act as a coach of coaches, initially taking on, say, two Teams, which both have Scrum Masters. In fact, this could be considered a pre-requisite for a coach as, if you cannot lead a Team, you probably should not be a coach.

The last point tells us that many of the characteristics of a great Scrum Master will be needed if you wish to be a great Agile Coach. Referencing [What Are The Characteristics of a Great Scrum Master?](#) characteristics include:

- Intimately familiar with Agile
- Intensely curious
- Responsible
- Excellent facilitator
- Collaborative
- Influential
- Highly available to the team
- Know when to stop talking
- All about the Team
- Sensitive “BS” detector

In the move to being an Agile Coach, some these characteristics become more important. For example, whereas the Scrum Master is expected to be an excellent facilitator, Agile Coaches are expected to be more competent. In addition characteristics of great Agile Coaches include:

- Systems thinking: The Agile Coach needs to see more of the system of delivery and the product / solution system both locally and in the enterprise. The awareness allows the Agile Coach to step back from the current burning issues and bring important awareness to the Team.
- Understand when to intervene, when not: This is based on the long term impact rather than short term solution.
- Be properly blunt: Part of the role of the Agile Coach is to help make the people / organization aware of issues so they will be dealt with. This means the Agile Coach must be comfortable raising uncomfortable (for the organization) issues. Change of an organization is hard, and the role of the Agile Coach is to keep the pressure on.

- Provide feedback has impact: Again the Agile Coach must be comfortable in confronting issues and providing feedback to named roles (e.g. Product Owner, Scrum Master). To have an impact, feedback must be fast. To have an impact an Agile Coach must craft the message so that it will be absorbed by the people it is directed to.
- Politic. From the above point this means that in many situations, the Agile Coach must be politic both at the individual and more organization level, so people are willing to work feedback and address the problems raised.
- Focus on the relationships: There is a tendency to focus on individual people when coaching. But the reality is that it is more important to focus on the interactions between people and to intentionally work the interactions to optimize the flow of value. Part of the role of the Agile Coach is to understand these interactions.
- Willingness to pair with other Agile Coaches: Agile suggests that knowledge work is better when you have two minds working something than one. Agile Coaches must be willing (seek out) pairing opportunities. This typically helps the Agile Coach in that there is an opportunity to learn, but also helps with standardizing the overall approach to coaching.
- Domain curiosity: A Coaching engagement is usually within a specific area or industry. To make an impact, coaching needs to be communicated in the language of the discipline, and needs to acknowledge the specifics of the situation the people are operating in. Coaches that don't do this risk coming across as “theoretical” or “too high level”. This means coaches need to be proactive in developing their understanding of the space so they can communicate messages which have impact.

How Do We Know If An Agile Coach is Successful?

Competent Agile Coaches deliver a healthy overall agile capability. This is evidenced by smooth, frequent, and high quality product or solutions delivery.

[Coaching](#), [Characteristic](#), [AgileCoach](#), [FAQ](#), [Great](#), [Role](#)

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