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Agile Mentor April 2009

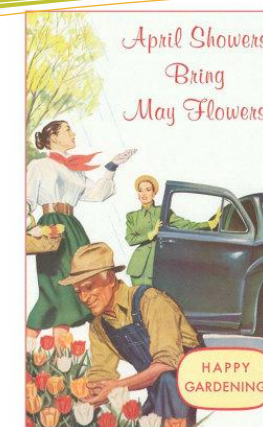
## Agile Dad

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April 2009

Agile Mentor  
Agile World

# Agile Mentor



## About the Author:

### V. LEE HENSON CST

This Certified Scrum Trainer's experience spans a broad array of technical software production roles and responsibilities. Lee has worked hands on as a GUI web developer, quality assurance analyst, automated test engineer, senior product manager, senior project manager, ScrumMaster, agile coach, consultant, and ADDIE training professional. He has worked with hundreds of teams to assist them in successful implementation of thousands of projects. His client list includes Fortune 500 companies, Government sector projects, small and large software production facilities, and multiple successful large scale e-commerce implementations.

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## April Agile Brings May?

Many people ask me what the best process is when it comes to handling defects within an Agile Organization. Some state that it is easiest to maintain defects in an independent backlog or tool and have a dedicated team work on them from there. Others believe letting the entire team work on the defects as part of their standard iteration is a best practice. Still others fall somewhere in between. The fact is, we all need to come to the realization that defects do happen and establish a way to overcome technical debt.

I like to think about technical debt in the same light as consumer credit card debt. It is never good, it never sleeps, and it is always there to remind us that we are in bondage to a different master than the one we may desire. As the debt increases, so does our stress. As our stress increases, so does our inability to work effectively. What can we do as an individual to be just a little better at reducing and ultimately eliminating any technical debt? What are the best practices as a team that we can follow to help product owners understand the risk of allowing the debt to build? How can we as an organization build trust in our teams and allow them the time needed to inspect and adapt? Are we giving our teams the time they need to build in quality? Is our regression testing automated and ready to help us lower our debt ratio?

In all reality, I think we know what happens if we woke up one morning and decided not to pay our bills. Our debt would increase, our credit score would surely suffer, interest rates would increase, and the people we owe money to would lose confidence in our ability to deliver on budget and on time.

Why should it be any different when our teams think about defects? Do we want to wind up in a situation where we owe more than we could ever afford to repay? What steps do we need to take to help teams get out of debt and stay out of debt?

We should never find ourselves in a position where we are worried about checking in the code because we are worried about the new debt that may be introduced. We should never be afraid to inspect and adapt due to the bugs we may find as a result of the inspection process. The ultimate question becomes how do we look forward to what is coming in May? How do we begin to answer the phone and open our mailbox again knowing that everything is going to be okay?

The fact is we need a call to action and a plan to eliminate our debt before it continues to grow and consume us!

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## Agile Dad



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V. Lee Henson - AgileDad



## April Agile Brings May? - Continued

**"Debt can hold a person or team for ransom! "**

**- V. Lee Henson CST**

The first step to correct this problem is to form a plan. No plan would be complete without a strategy of execution. I have seen plans as simple as allowing the entire development team a single iteration to eliminate as many defects as possible. I have seen plans as elaborate as swinging resources from project to project and injecting medicine where the pain hurts the most.

In my opinion, I feel there is a step needed even before this first step. We need to identify the root cause of the pain / debt to prevent it from increasing further. Once we have identified the creation point of the problem, we need to formulate a plan to not allow the problem to continue to flood the team with defects. This should be done even at the expense of the team slowing down significantly. The fact is, the result will be better if the team does slow down and gain their footing instead of always trying to continuously run.

The next step is to help the team understand that defects are a common part of doing business and they are not the first team to ever get buried. Although you may feel this is quite obvious to the team, the truth is many may feel ashamed because of the amount of debt continuing to grow.

The hardest sell tends to be on the business side where helping people understand the need to remove the debt outweighs the desire to continue pressing forward in the creation of additional debt.

Someone once said you need to spend money to make money. This is not the case when it comes to Agile Software Development. You need to save money to make money in this world! The easiest way to do that is to allow the team to get caught up and promote best practices when it comes to the team reducing and eventually eliminating technical debt.

Once the problem is identified and addressed and the strategy has been discussed openly and is set to move forward, the team can begin execution to help eliminate the debt.

Once again with reference to personal debt, we are taught to eliminate the debts starting with the debt with the lowest balance and snow balling the funds to eliminate the larger ones.

If we use this same practice to eliminate our technical debt, we will soon find that the resources will have more time to focus.

**"In this economy, you need to save money to make money."**

**- V. Lee Henson CST**

The debt will begin to melt away and the team will feel empowered to generate new feature and enhancement work. The team and management will appreciate knowing that they are no longer under the bondage of technical debt and can feel confident that all new work will commence with a clean slate.

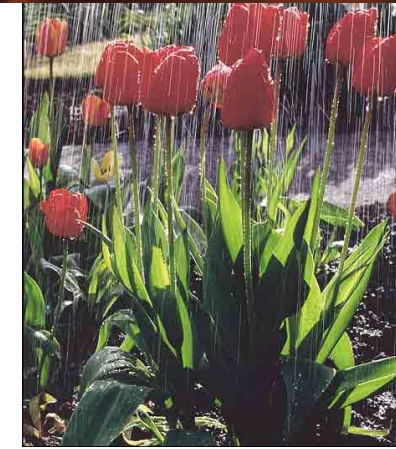
When all of the dust settles, we should do what we can to reduce and or eliminate waste and defects. These are often a result of trying to run faster than we can sustain. The team should focus on their ability to inspect and adapt and learn to forecast, and estimate in such a way that it allows them to work at a sustainable pace.

Often times we are required to slow down in order to hurry up. We need to regain our strength to press forward. In order for us to be happy with the result of what comes in May, we need to give the team a solid April to work on.

Once the team realizes that they will be allowed to work at a pace that reduces debt, they will be happy to provide the organization with the best they can build! The quicker we realize that we need to crawl before we walk, the quicker we will be successful. The quicker we assist the quality assurance group in getting testing caught up and automated, the easier it becomes for the team to expect that they will be serviced and accommodated in a timely manner. Success is directly aligned with adaptation.

These adjustments do not come easy. Many people will need to believe in the cause and assist in helping others see the value in eliminating debt and working as close to debt free as possible. Teams never succeed when they are continuously behind the eight ball! We need to help them gain the vision and execute the strategy.

People really can make a difference if you trust and believe in them. What have you done for your team lately?



## This Month's Agile Q&A

**Q: Is AgileDad still writing a book?**

A: Yes! Although we have suffered a few minor delays in the timeline, we are still expecting the book to be released sometime this year. We will be certain to keep you posted in future Agile Mentor Newsletters.

**Q: If a tree fell in a forest and nobody was there to hear it, does it make a sound?**

A: This must be the April fool's question for the month. I never really gave it much thought. Especially since I was not there to hear if it made a sound or not... what do you think? Email us and we will post the results next month.



## EYE ON IT Upcoming AgileDad Engagements:

May 29<sup>th</sup> San Francisco, CA  
AgilePalooza – I'm Speaking!  
<http://www.agilepalooza.com>

June 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> Las Vegas, NV  
Better Software Conference  
I will be there!

June 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> Salt Lake City,  
Agile Roots Conference  
<http://www.agileroots.com>

June 24<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> San Francisco  
Innovation Games Conference

## AgileDad Private Course Offerings:

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Agile For Executives  
Agile Boot Camp  
Agile Business Requirements  
ScrumMaster Certification  
Scrum Product Owner  
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On-Site Agile Coaching and  
Consulting are also available.

For more information or to book a  
course today, please contact:

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