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#### • Agile Q&A:

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July 2009

Agile Mentor  
Agile World

# Agile Mentor



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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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## The Hunt For Continuous Improvement

I will never forget the session I had with the VP of a large organization who requested my assistance with their transition to Agile. Needless to say, I was honored and ready to do the job to the best of my ability. I wanted to find a way to gauge his level of understanding of the Agile process without coming across as condescending. I decided to ask a very direct question. In order to best assist the organization in this transition, I needed to know and better understand the vision and goals he had in mind for where his group was now, and where he would like to be. I asked what one goal would he like to achieve to help his organization be recognized as a leader in the Agile community?

The answer I got nearly floored me! You see, he went on to tell me that without a little background the rest of the story may not make sense. He then proceeded to tell me about the way things used to be... you know, before things got back in some semblance of order. He told me about the days of cowboy development and renegade guerilla quality assurance. He went on to tell me about how it was when the teams had control and as a result, how much operational efficiency within the team suffered.

He continued by telling me how difficult it was for the group to finally regain control of what was happening around them.

He expressed to me that if he could only have one wish in order to make his organization more successful, he would like to see the core teams increase from 85 to 90 percent in efficiency.

I sat in silence for a moment and scratched my head. Then when I could no longer stand the silence I asked please do tell me the metrics you are using to gather this efficiency rating? I was hoping that this may have been a terminology thing and that he may have been trying to refer to some different Agile metric he was trying to capture. My hopes were crushed when he proceeded to show me the tight time related metrics he was using to see these numbers.

To be perfectly clear, I am very supportive of continuous improvement. I am not supportive of micro management as a method to achieve continuous improvement. There are plenty of ways in which we can interact with the team and provide them with useful information to help them improve. We need to keep in mind that in this specific case, what the management was asking for and what they were really trying to improve were two completely different things.

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## Agile Dad

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# Agile Dad



### Leading Agile

I wanted to take a moment here to congratulate Mike Cottmeyer on the exciting news that he will soon be releasing a book! For those of you who have not had the pleasure to meet Mike, he is passionate about the Agile workspace. The only person I have ever talked with that exuded a more memorable conversation might have been Alistair Cockburn.

Mike is a great person who I have had the distinct pleasure of working with on a number of engagements and I could not think of anyone who deserves this honor more. Great job Mike and we at AgileDad look forward to your presentations at Agile 2009!

To learn more about Mike and Leading Agile, please visit:

<http://leadingagile.com>



## Cont: The Hunt For Continuous Improvement

**"When visibility disappears, the heat is on!"**

– V. Lee Henson CST

What the management is struggling to see is that the team and or the agile process provide sufficient value to the organization. This is a persistent smell that there is just no visibility into what is being completed as part of the lifecycle of the project. Management tends to lay off of the pressure when they feel the team is being transparent in all they are doing.

When visibility disappears, that is when the heat is on! The first step to help us best understand the complexity of the situation is to realize that Managers are a vital part of the team and they are not going away anytime soon. They are provided to the team as a resource to help the team continuously improve. They have achieved a level of success by consistently tightening the belt and looking for the most immediate of results.

What I needed to really figure out is was the request for increased efficiency on the team really a request for something completely different?

The truth of the matter is that the VP in this case was very frustrated that when the team had control, he had no clue what was happening and the answer was to go back to a more traditional style of command and control to regain the needed focus he desired.

The part that was left out here is that I am not quite certain the team knew exactly what the VP was looking for but could not find. They were unaware of the location of the breakdown in communication.

The VP applied indirect pressure on his management team to increase team productivity and efficiency by having every team get something done that was most visible and tangible. The question remains is that really what the VP was asking for? The clue here rests in the fact that the VP finally said the key words I was looking for. The team was simply not getting things 'done'.

In a concerted effort to embrace lean/kanban theory, I would argue that the first step this team needed to take is to regain the trust of all those they work for by adopting a highly visible story board and embracing WIP limits to establish that the days of 23 stories in progress and only one completed are over. The team needs to set a limit to the number of stories that can be in progress.

They need to consistently stick to the limits and show releasable demonstrable features at the end of each iteration.

**"Accountability is not optional."**

– V. Lee Henson CST

Restricting the number of items with in progress status, allows the team to focus on a grouping of core component items to be completed.

The next step to a successful hunt lies in the process you embrace for delivering functional software.

I am finding that as more and more organizations are moving towards Agile Development, more and more teams are becoming confused as to the process they choose to adopt to get the ball rolling.

One key that I have been having teams focus on is Test Driven Development or TDD. The August 2009 edition of the Agile Mentor Newsletter will feature a guest writer who is a noted authority on the topic and will take you through all of the happiness that comes from embracing testing first.

A second key to the successful hunt could be in not always seeking out the prized trophy. This does not mean slow down and deliver the least acceptable result. This does mean to focus on what you are building and release what makes the most sense to the organization. There is a time and place for the quest for perfection. The quest here is for as close to bug free delivery of a product that provides value as possible. Sometimes the focus on perfection means nothing ever gets 'done'.

We need to refine our definition of done as a team and really focus on what we are trying to deliver.

Finally, we need to understand that the organization has hired your team to deliver a solution that exceeds their expectations. They are taking good care of you with the expectation that you will return the favor.

Remember, with great power comes great responsibility. Accountability is not optional.



## EYE ON IT Upcoming AgileDad Engagements:

July 2<sup>nd</sup> Agile Roundtable SLC

August 6<sup>th</sup> Agile Roundtable SLC

August 3<sup>rd</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> VersionOne  
Quarterly Service Sessions

August 24<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> Agile 2009  
Chicago, IL  
[Http://agile2009.com](http://agile2009.com)

## AgileDad Private Course Offerings:

Private course offerings are available including:

Agile For Executives  
Agile Boot Camp  
Agile Business Requirements  
Agile Meeting Facilitation  
ScrumMaster Certification  
Scrum Product Owner  
Certification  
Managing & Grooming The  
Product Backlog

On-Site Agile Coaching and  
Consulting are also available.

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

Lee Henson – 801-898-0295  
[lee@agiledad.com](mailto:lee@agiledad.com)



## This Month's Agile Q&A

**Q: What tool do you recommend to assist us in our Agile implementation?**

A: The answer is emphatically YES! I have always and will continue to recommend VersionOne as a solution that best meets the needs of most teams. The latest release of the software includes many features not found in any other software. The interface is flexible yet easy to use and the reporting is bar none the best I have seen.

When you are ready for a tool, VersionOne is the answer.

**Q: Is there a free tool that you recommend to help a team get started with Agile?**

A: Two related questions this month.. Yes. At the risk of this sounding like a commercial, I am going to once again refer people to VersionOne! The V1 Team solution is not quite as robust as their enterprise solution, but it still beats the pants off of every other free tool out there.

Go give it a shot, you will not be disappointed.

