

AGILE for NON-SOFTWARE TEAMS

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A Practical Guide for Your Journey



Supplementary resource for the book *Agile for Non-Software Teams*. More at AgileForNonSoftwareTeams.com

Considerations for Choosing Your Agile Coach

Agile coaching facilitates the growth of the client's Agility through feedback, awareness, and options. It's such a special service that its consumers don't always know what to expect from it, or what to ask for. For instance, it's distinct from leading, teaching, and consulting – useful but rare stances for a coach who helps develop a mind-set rather than inflicts a process. If you've decided to engage an Agile coach, assess your candidates with the following parameters in mind.

- **People Orientation.** In Agile, people come before product and process. Your coach should have the same value if they're to help you grow outstanding Agile teams.
- **Empathy.** Talking about process mechanics is easy and simple, whereas helping people adopt a mind-set is neither. Savvy Agile coaches understand human psychology, mental models, and responses to change. They help clients change behaviours, not merely master techniques.
- **Credibility and Trustworthiness.** People won't *willingly* accept coaching from someone they don't trust or consider credible. You and your teams must feel comfortable that the coach has what it takes to help you accomplish your Agility outcome, given your context. If they tout certifications, ask what it took to earn them.
- **Flexibility.** Coaching is meant to help people manifest the Agile values and principles effectively and congruently. The coach's style – whether hands-off or hands-on, directive or participative – should be flexible and fit your context and the teams' needs. Above all, the coach must respect your culture, not tell you what it should be.
- **Systems Thinking.** Since your teams operate within an entire organization, coaching them in isolation is rarely effective for bringing about sustained change. A great Agile coach works with various related role-players, helping them espouse the Agile mind-set from *their* perspective.
- **Results.** Ask your candidate about their results in tough situations. Role-play situations that occur in your culture. Ask for references from teams they have worked with, not merely from the senior managers who had hired the candidate.
- **Customization.** Rather than force-fit you into their favorite mold (typically Scrum, Kanban, or SAFe), your Agile guide should help you and your teams develop strategies and tactics that suit your goals, needs, culture, and tolerance for change. They shouldn't merely prescribe documented processes or context-free "best practices."
- **Self-Sufficiency.** Excellent coaches quickly make themselves redundant. What will yours do to eliminate your teams' dependence on external coaching? How long will you need to keep your coach around? What will happen when they're gone? Have that conversation early.

Be *extra cautious* about hiring a coach through recruiters or agencies, since they cannot and will not assess their candidates this way. Remember, **great coaches are not buzzword-compliant resources.**