Change Artistry Handout

Readings and Notes for Lean Agile Scotland 2014 Pre-Conference Workshop

Esther Derby

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Are You Ready to Change?

Change artists want to help other people learn and change. But before they can help others change they need to be ready to work their art. Being ready means that you have relevant skills and domain knowledge, of course. But the foundational skill in coaching change is skill in managing yourself.

Your attitude will contribute or detract from your ability to make contact, assess what is needed, and actually help the client. So, before you begin, ask yourself a few questions.

Are you aware of your own emotional state? Manage your own emotions before you try to help others change. If you're feeling angry or impatient, your emotions will leak into your interactions. Anger, frustration, or impatience won't create a helpful interaction. Look inside to see where your emotions are coming from: Are you expecting an inexperienced person to perform as well as a master? What are your assumptions about what the other person should know or be able to do? Does the current way of working seem stupid to you? Rather than blame the other person, reframe your judgment as "He doesn't do that as well as I wish he did" or "She doesn't know as much about this topic as I wish she did" or "This way of working must have made sense at some point, from some point of view." Shifting your own attitude will help you connect with others.

Does the other person want to change? Change coaching

always works better when the other person actually wants help and actually wants to change. Try to wait for the person or team to come to you for help rather than immediately stepping in. Many people learn from solving problems on their own. That doesn't mean you always have to wait until someone asks for your help. You can always offer help. But remember that it's an offer.

Does the other person want for coaching from you? Sometimes people want help making a change, but they want it from someone else. Don't take it personally if someone would prefer to receive help from someone other than you. But, look for patterns. If people are open to help from everyone but you, it's a clue that the relationship may need repair.

Are you clear on the goal? If you aren't clear on the desired outcome, you risk setting up a frustrating cycle called "bring me a rock." "Bring me a rock" happens when success criteria are vague (or nonexistent). Here's how it goes. You say, "Bring me a rock." The other person goes off and finds a rock, and brings it back to show you. You look at the rock and realize it's not the rock you had in mind. You hand the rock back and say, "Not that rock." And the cycle begins again. The result is frustration and de-motivation—guaranteed! Of course, sometimes the goal isn't known in detail. In that case, make it clear that the goal is to explore options and gain clarity.

Are you open to other approaches? You may have a very clear idea of what the end result of a change should look like and how to get there. But is it the only way? In most situations, there are many reasonable and acceptable paths to success. If you find yourself expecting things to be done a certain way, ask yourself if that way is simply your preference

and not the only correct method. Think of at least three possible ways to attain the goal. Then, generate additional ideas with the people you are helping. Discuss the pros and cons of each approach. Then let them choose the one that fits best. People take ownership when they change based on their own thinking modes, strengths, and talents.

Are you ready to encourage rather than evaluate? Coaching change is often about helping another person develop skills and capabilities; it's not a time for evaluation. Evaluation hinders coaching by creating a "one-up, one-down" dynamic. Most people have enough trouble asking for help in our culture without adding this burden. Stay away from comparative words such as good, better, worse, and bad. When you think the other person is headed down a rat hole, ask questions about risks and impacts rather than criticizing. Then help generate new ideas. Offer encouragement to let people know they are moving in the right direction.

When you can answer "Yes" to these questions, you're ready to make contact. And that's the first step for any change.

Questions for Centering

Self

How do you feel about your current coaching assignment?

How to you feel about the change you are helping people make?

How do you feel about the people you will be coaching?

Other

What are five good and valid reasons the people you are working with might have for not changing?

What exists in the organization that might keep people from successfully making the change?

Which of these factors are in their control?

Which are within their sphere of influence?

Which of these factors are in your control? Your sphere of influence?

Stay in Touch

I am always delighted to hear from people I've met in work-shops. Please feel free to email me if you have questions about the ideas we discussed in our workshop, or to discuss a change you are working on in your organization.

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Each month, I hold a FREE Q&A teleconference call. I pick a topic, touch on key issues and then open it up for questions. You can sign up to receive notice of this and other events at http://www.estherderby.com/qa-teleconferences.