

The Coaching backlog: A Structured Approach to Client Success

¹Padma Priya and ²Santoshanand Adkar,
¹Founder, Agile Bodhi, India, ²Santoshanand Adkar, Agile Thought Leader, India,

Abstract

Coaching is a complex practice requiring coaches to navigate a labyrinth of expressed and underlying client needs and thoughts. To effectively manage this intricate process, this research paper proposes the concept of a 'coach backlog.' By formalizing the identification, prioritization, and resolution of client issues, the coach backlog aims to enhance coaching efficacy and client satisfaction."

Coaching is a collaborative process that helps individuals or groups unlock their potential, achieve their goals, and enhance their performance. It's a multi layered deep process for a coach to help the clients achieve their goals. To help in this complex process 'Coach backlog' is useful to facilitate powerful coaching sessions.

Keywords—Agile, Scrum, Kanban, Coach backlog

I. INTRODUCTION

Coach backlog is influenced by Product backlog which is one of the three artifacts from scrum framework.

A product backlog is a prioritized list of features, enhancements, and other requirements needed to build a successful product. It serves as the roadmap for the development team. Here are some key characteristics:

1. **Prioritized:** Items are ranked based on their value to the product and business.
2. **Transparent:** The backlog is visible to all stakeholders, ensuring everyone is aligned on the product vision.
3. **Detailed:** Each item should be clearly defined and understood by the development team.
4. **Dynamic:** The backlog is constantly evolving as the product and market needs change.
5. **Refined:** Items are continuously refined and detailed as the product development progresses.
6. **Estimated:** Items are typically estimated in terms of effort or story points to aid in planning and prioritization.
7. **Owned by the Product Owner:** The Product Owner is responsible for managing and maintaining the product backlog.

By adhering to these characteristics, teams can ensure that their product backlog is effective and supports the successful development of their product.

Just as a product backlog is a prioritized list of features for a product, a coaching backlog can be a structured list of objectives, challenges, or areas of focus for a coaching client.

Here's how a coaching backlog can be similar to a product backlog:

1. **Prioritized:** Items can be ranked based on their importance to the client's goals or the coach's assessment of their impact.
2. **Transparent:** The backlog can be shared with the client to ensure alignment and understanding.
3. **Detailed:** Each item should be clearly defined and understood by both the coach and client.
4. **Dynamic:** The backlog can be updated and revised as the client's needs and goals evolve.
5. **Refined:** Items can be refined through discussions with the client to ensure they are clear and actionable.
6. **Estimated:** While not always quantified in the same way as product backlog items, coaching items can be estimated in terms of time, effort, or complexity.
7. **Owned by the Coach:** The coach is responsible for managing and maintaining the coaching backlog.

By using a coaching backlog, coaches can provide a structured approach to guiding clients towards their goals, ensuring that they stay focused and motivated throughout the coaching process.

Apart from the above parameters, the coaching backlog can capture significant insights shared by clients during coaching sessions. By bullet-pointing key phrases and eliminating filler words, we found this approach to be particularly valuable in identifying 'bright spots,' or moments of clarity and inspiration.

II. WIDELY USED FRAMEWORKS

One of the fundamental questions that troubles the Coach is how will he approach a Coachee or when a Coachee approaches the Coach how will the Coach respond to it and how will the conversation progress?

Here the GROW or T-GROW model helps the coach to start the conversation.

<p>T</p>	<p>Topic</p> <p>What is the topic the Coachee would like to discuss? The reason to mention “T”, here is that sometimes the Coachee is not sure on what specific topic they need the coaching. Here the Coach really helps the Coachee by asking powerful questions like below:</p> <p>"What could we work on that would help you the most over the next few weeks?"</p> <p>"What ideas did you have in mind for this coaching session?"</p> <p>"What's been working well for you since the last session?"</p> <p>"What hasn't been working for you lately?"</p> <p>"What do you need most from me today?"</p> <p>"I'm curious. How do you think I can best help you this week?"</p> <p>"What's been niggling at you lately?"</p> <p>"What's disturbing your peace of mind?"</p> <p>"Which area of your life could most do with a tune-up?"</p>
<p>G</p>	<p>GOAL</p> <p>Goal setting for the session as well as for the short term and long term making it SMART</p> <p>An eight-step approach based on Well Formed Outcomes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.State what you want in the positive. <i>What do you want?</i> 2.Find out what evidence they need to demonstrate success. <i>How will you know when you have what you want? How will you look, sound and feel? What will be the same – different? This is a must for recognizing success</i> 3.Can you start and maintain the process to get what you want? <i>What stops you from having it right now? What do you need? What is your first step?</i> 4.You presently do things which work, so what part of your present behavior can you use to get what you want? 5.In what context do you want this? <i>Everywhere or somewhere specific? When do you want it – all of the time? When, where and with whom do you not want it?</i> 6.What are the costs of what you want? <i>Is it worth the cost to you? What will you gain? What will you lose?</i> 7.Is it worth the time it is going to take? 8.Is it what you want in keeping with your own purpose, your sense of self and identity?
<p>R</p>	<p>REALITY</p> <p>Reality Checking to explore the current situation. Below questions will help the Coachee to describe the real situation on ground.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •How did you/do you feel about....? •What is the predominant feeling when....? •What do you think you are afraid of? •Can you give me a rating on a scale of 1 – 10 for your level of confidence in your ability to do....? •‘What action have you taken on this so far? Followed by •‘What were the effects of that action?’ or, if the answer is nothing! •‘What are the factors that prevented you from taking action?’

O	<p>OPTIONS</p> <p>What are the current options and alternative strategies or course of actions that can be taken by the Coachee.</p> <p>Some very common negative responses are:</p> <p>I don't know</p> <p>It can't be done</p> <p>It can't be done like that</p> <p>They would never agree to that</p> <p><i>It's bound to cost too much/take too much time</i></p> <p>To unlock negativity the following 'what if...' questions may work</p> <p>What if you knew the answer? What would it be?</p> <p>What if the obstacle didn't exist? What would you do then?</p> <p>What if you did have enough money/time?</p> <p>The key is to identify the limiting belief; the solutions and choices are then much easier to find.</p>
W	<p>WILL TO DO</p> <p>This is the most important part of the conversation. How much is the Coachee willing to take the actions that have been identified as part of the options</p> <p>Some questions that may help are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •What are you going to do? •When are you going to do it? •Will this action meet your goal? •What obstacles might you meet along the way? •Who needs to know? •What support do you need? •How and when are you going to get that support? •What other considerations do you have? •On a scale of 1-10 how confident are you that will carry out the actions agreed? •What prevents it from being a 10? •What would make it a 10 for you?

Coaching is a cornerstone of Agile, enhancing team performance and adaptability. While applicable across fields, coaching is especially effective in Agile contexts. To help Agile coaches for an enhanced execution, this paper helps with some coach backlogs for various roles.

The Agile Coach generally coaches the below roles in the Organization:

1. Scrum Master
2. Product Owner / Product Manager
3. Leaders
4. Agile Team(s)

Below are the sample Backlogs for the Agile Coach to follow:

1. Scrum Master

Sr. No	Topics	Status as of 01/01/2024	Status as of 01/04/2024	Status as of 01/07/2024	Status as of 01/10/2024
1	Agile Mindset				

2	Backlog Refinement				
3	Sprint Planning				
4	Daily Scrum				
5	Effective Retrospectives				
6	Effective Sprint Reviews				
7	Facilitation				
8	Impediments				
9	Definition of Ready, Definition of Done				
10	Features & US				
11	Improving Metrics				
12	System Thinking & SL & Conflicts				
13	Doing vs Being Agile				
14	Antipattern				
15	Coaching vs Mentoring				
16	Innovative Approaches				
17	Pair more with Product Owner				
18	Convincing Development Manager as Scrum Master doesn't have authority				
19	Incident Handling				
20	Preparation for Development Manager Role				
21	Miscellaneous				

2. Product Owner / Product Manager

Sr. No	Topics	Status as of 01/01/2024	Status as of 01/04/2024	Status as of 01/07/2024	Status as of 01/10/2024
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1	INVEST DEEP Techniques				
2	Sprint Goal				
3	Smart Product Owner Practices				
4	Time Mgmt & Work Prioritization				
5	Features & User Stories				
6	Prioritization Techniques				
7	Doing Vs Being Agile				
8	Best Practices				
9	Sprint Review Practices				
10	Facilitation				
11	Backlog Refinement Techniques				
12	Embedded Coaching				
13	Smart Template or Formats				
14	Communication to Leadership and Stakeholders				
15	4 Sprint Readiness				
16	Building Strategic thinking- Product strategy, vision				
17	Develop high level IT knowledge				

3. Leadership

Sr. No	Topics	Status as of 01/01/2024	Status as of 01/04/2024	Status as of 01/07/2024	Status as of 01/10/2024
1	Agile Mindset				
2	Why Agile? Why Transformation?				

3	Psychological Safety for Teams				
4	Agile and Leadership				
5	Radical Candor				
6	Doing Agile to Being Agile Leader				
7	Systems Thinking & Strategy				
8	Business Agility				
9	Different kinds of Leadership				
10	Different Change Models				

4. Agile Team

Sr. No	Topics	Status as of 01/01/2024	Status as of 01/04/2024	Status as of 01/07/2024	Status as of 01/10/2024
1	Team Canvas - 2 sessions should be fine				
2	Agile assessment for all the team members				
3	Introduction to Agile				
4	Scrum in a nutshell				
5	Importance of all the events of Scrum				
6	5 Dysfunctions in the Team				
7	Agile Mindset - From Doing Agile to Being Agile				
8	User Story Slicing				
9	Estimation of User Stories, Yesterday's weather				
10	Definition of Ready, Definition of Done, Acceptance Criteria				

11	User Story Mapping				
12	Value Stream Mapping				
13	Shu Ha Ri				
14	Velocity and its importance to the team				
15	Introduction to DevOps and Pair Programming				
16	Root Cause Analysis				
17	Design Thinking Principles				
18	Psychological Safety				
19	High Performance Team				
20	Emotional Intelligence for Agile teams				
21	Agile Ways of Working - Working Agreement				

The above backlogs are just sample ones and you can add more details to the backlog based on your conversations with the respective Coachee. Main intent of the backlog is to be more structured and tracking becomes easy. There are various tools and techniques with which you can create the Backlog.

1. Dysfunction Mapping Exercise helps you to watch for anti-patterns and with that you can prepare a backlog for solutions and actions for the team.
2. Value Stream Mapping exercise gives you the details of the waste, improvements which can be part of your backlog.
3. User Story Mapping Exercise explains the details of the importance of MVPs, Release Plans which can be part of your backlog.

CONCLUSION

Coaching backlog always helps to have a constructive discussion of the Coach and Coachee and it helps to be aligned to what is the expectation of the coachee from the coach. Structured approach always helps the coach as this can also be a practice which can be followed by the coachee.

References

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 [2] <https://medium.com/idealo-tech-blog/the-agile-coaching-backlog-6cbb55f69b52>

Glossary

INVEST: Independent, Negotiable, Valuable, Estimable, Small, Testable
 DEEP: Detailed, Estimated, Empirical, Prioritised.
 GROW: Goal, Reality, Options, Will.