

Product Owner as Servant Leader

21st Century Product Management

Nigel Baker

Agile Coach, Business Coach, Certified Scrum Trainer

The Slide of Boastfulness. AKA Argument from Authority.

- One of the early Scrum people in Europe. (2003ish)
- Agile Coach for over thirteen years in a variety of UK and EU companies – Starting at **BT**.
- **Certified Scrum Trainer** for well over a decade.
- Led **AgileBear** for a similar period of time as CEO and lead coach.
- Worked with everyone. *(I've probably worked with your company or someone you know at some point)*
- Presented everywhere. *(Dozens of conferences, a handful of keynotes, on multiple continents)*
- Annoyed a few people. *(Dozens of blocks on twitter, ScrumAlliance, LinkedIn "Thought Leaders".)*
- Sorry.

Welcome to Product Ownership!

Leave your backlogs at the door.

No JIRA tickets allowed.

Classic PO

- Business person.
- Busyness Person
- Powerful
- IT ignorant.
- Arrogant.
- Trouble.





XP Gold Donor != Gold Owner

STRESS



DEBTS CAREER FINANCE PROBLEMS CHRONIC BILL EXHAUSTED STRUGGLE
HEAVY HEALTH EFFORT CHAOS DIET MONEY WORKPLACE SAVING
MONEY DEBTS WORRIED COPING PROBLEMS PRESSURE
COPING FRUSTRATION DEADLINES
BILL CONFUSION DIVORCE OVERLOADED
CONFUSION DAMAGE

RENAMED BUSINESS ANALYST

STORIES



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RENAMED BUSINESS ANALYST

"Ever get
the feeling
you've
been
cheated?"



**PRODUCT OWNER =
PRODUCT MANAGER**

AGILE BAKER

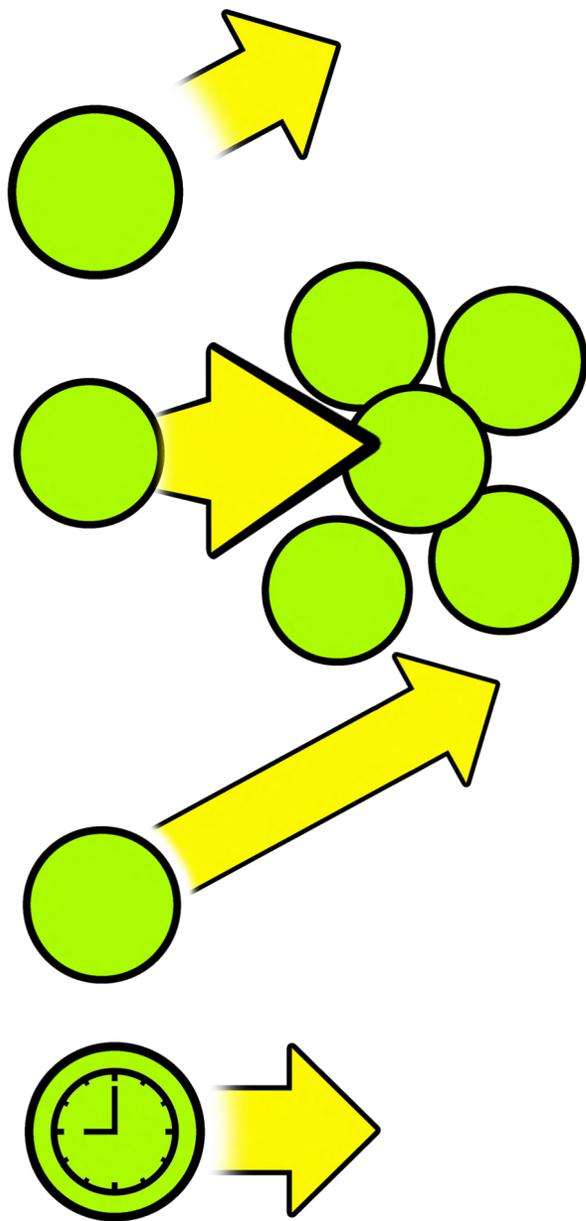
Advanced Advancedness

WHY BEING BETTER IS GREAT BUT BEING
GREAT MAYBE DANGEROUS

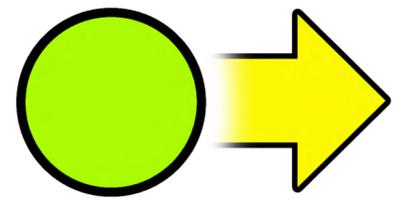
Nigel Baker - CST, Agile Coach, Director of Better

Master

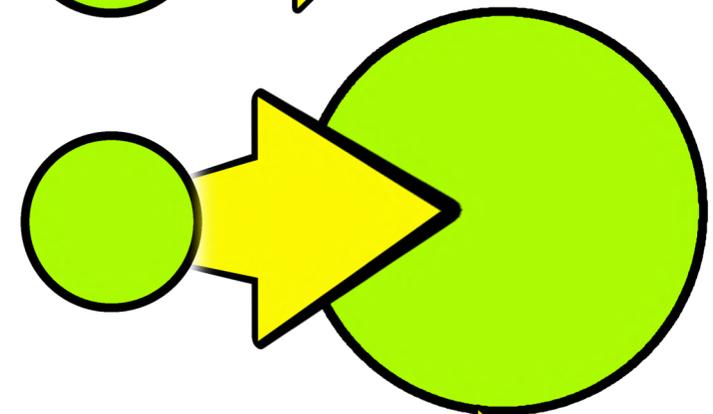




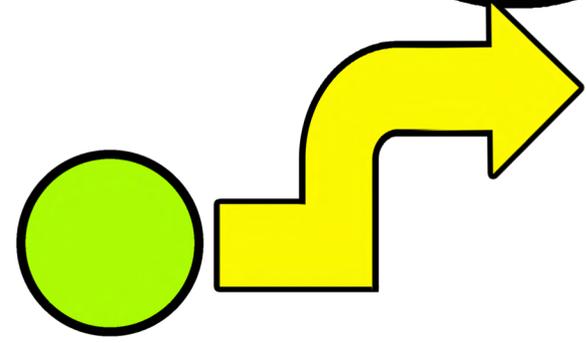
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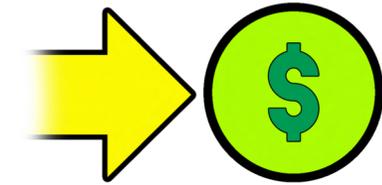
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over



over



ScrumMaster
(and it's weaker cousin,
the lesser spotted Agile
Coach)



Product Owner



Product Owner



HYPOTHESIS:

Can the Product Owner job be as emotionally intelligent as the ScrumMaster?

What aspects lean the ScrumMaster job in that direction?

History of Servant-Leadership

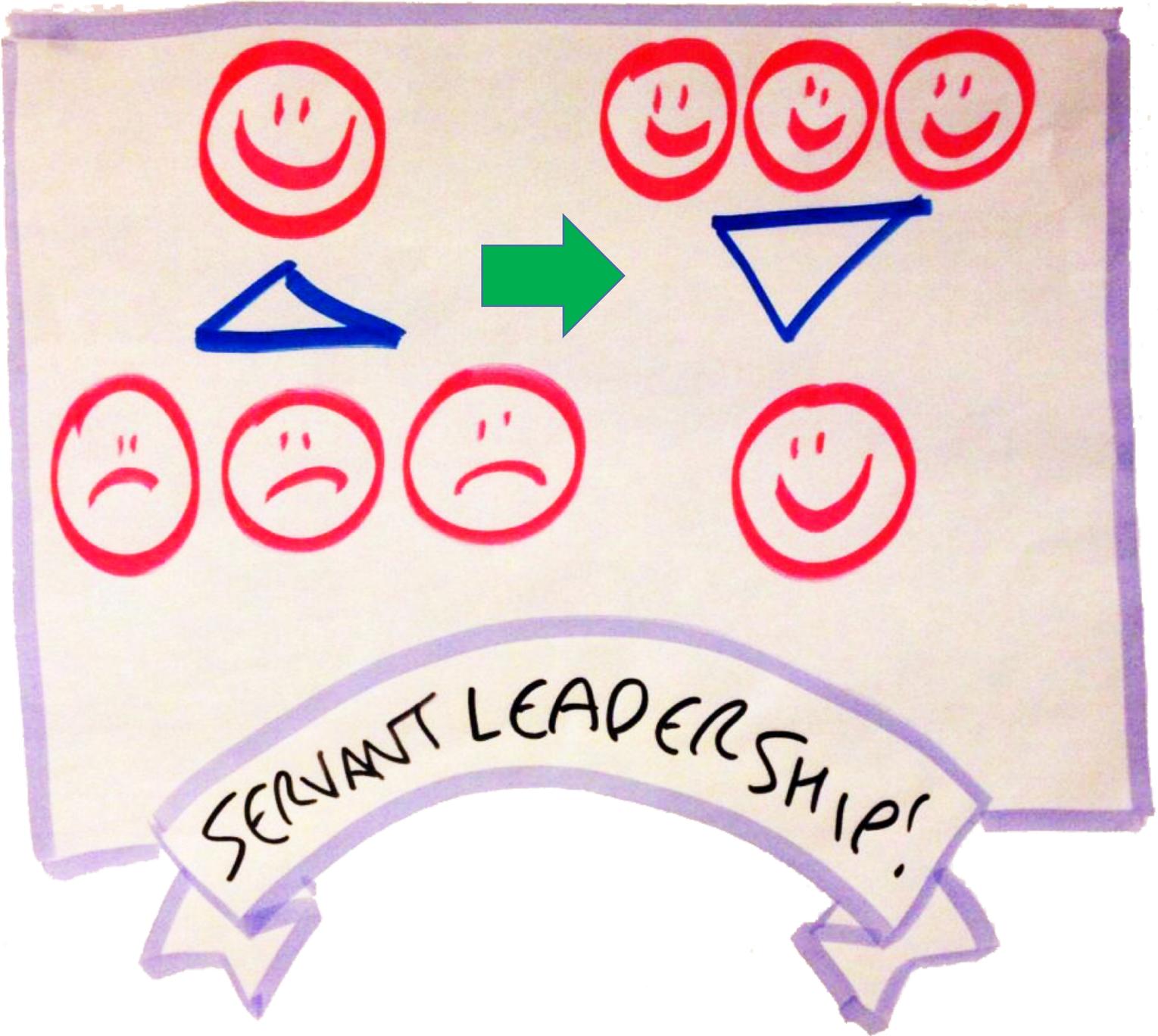


1904-1990

Director of Management of AT&T

38 years service

- The phrase “*servant leadership*” was first coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in ***The Servant as Leader***, an essay that he first published in 1970.
- *“The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first... The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served.”*



SERVANT LEADERSHIP!

TEN Characteristics of Servant Leadership

By Larry C. Spears

Empathy

- A Servant Leader Product Owner has the ability to recognize and understand feelings and emotions that experienced by their stakeholders, customers, developers and users.
- A Product Owner such as this will care for their communities and will deeply experience their emotions. This deep connection will mean their actions are motivated by a genuine desire to help.
- The SLPO is not mercenary and not exploitative. They want to solve the problems of real people.



Listening

- A Servant Leader Product Owner has the ability to pay complete attention to others and really hear what they are saying. Using active listening to appreciate and generate real understanding.
- This coaching skill allows the SLPO to gain a deep understanding of their customers and also creates a deep connection with the Scrum Teams.





Service information

Date **TUESDAY 26TH AUGUST 2014**

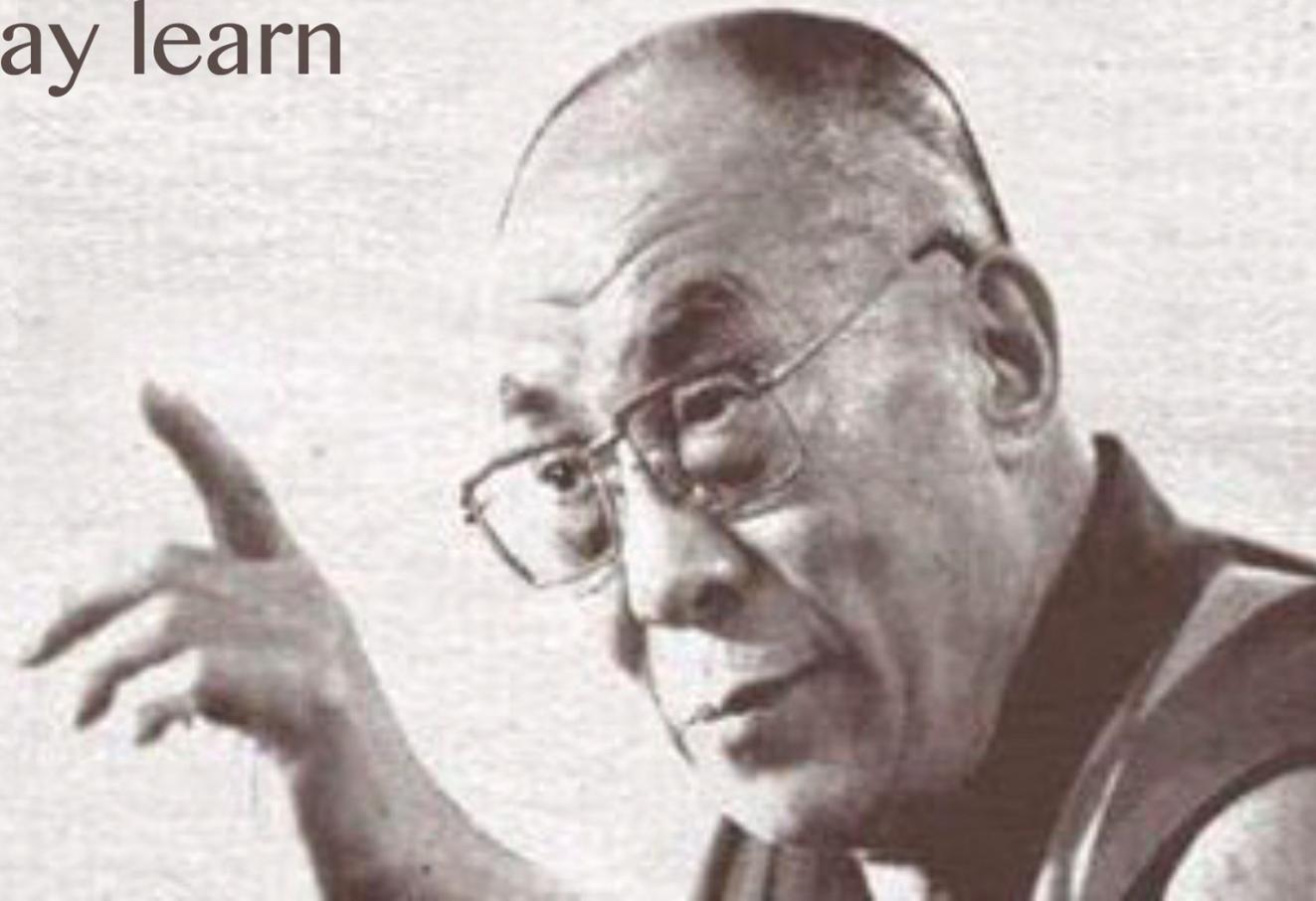
Time **QUOTE OF THE DAY**

" MOST PEOPLE DO NOT LISTEN WITH INTENT TO UNDERSTAND. THEY LISTEN WITH THE INTENT TO REPLY."

— **STEPHEN. R. COVEY**

When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. But if you listen, you may learn something new.

- **Dalai Lama**



- *Cosmetic* Listening
- *Conversational* Listening
- **Active** Listening
- **Deep** Listening



Active Listening

- **Pay attention**
 - 100% eye contact. Don't prepare to rebut.
- **Be involved**
 - Watch your body language and listen to theirs
 - Use confirming phrases - "Aha", "yeh", "OK", "I get it" etc.
- **What am I hearing you say**
 - Reflective listening.
- **What did you mean when you say**
 - Ask questions to clarify
 - Paraphrasing and feedback
 - Summarize at the end.
- **Don't judge**
 - Don't interrupt.
 - Don't counter argue
- **Respond appropriately.**
 - Open honest and respectful.
- **Minimise internal distractions.**

Active Listening Stems

Paraphrasing:

- *“In other words....”*
- *“It sounds like what you’re saying is...”*
- *“This is what I’m hearing you say...”*
- *“Let me see if I’m understanding you....”*

The facilitator then restates what he/she heard, followed by a question asking if the paraphrasing was correct.

Drawing People Out:

- *“This is what I’m hearing you say...Is that correct?”*
- *“What I am hearing is.... Am I missing something...?”*
- *“I’m hearing... is there anything else you feel I should know?”*

Reflective Listening

- A communication strategy involving two key steps:
 1. Seeking to understand a speaker's idea,
 2. Then offering the idea back to the speaker, to confirm the idea has been understood correctly.

Summarizing what the speaker said, using the speaker's own words rather than merely paraphrasing words and phrases, thereby mirroring the essential concept of the speaker.

"Reconstruct what the client is thinking and feeling and to relay this understanding back to the client."

Healing

- Followers typically desire a leader who has a sincere interest in their well being. Physically, emotionally and spiritually. A Servant Leader Product Owner take an active role in promotion of the emotional and mental health of their customers, users and stakeholders, and treat them as if they were part of their own team.
- Especially with their own development team!



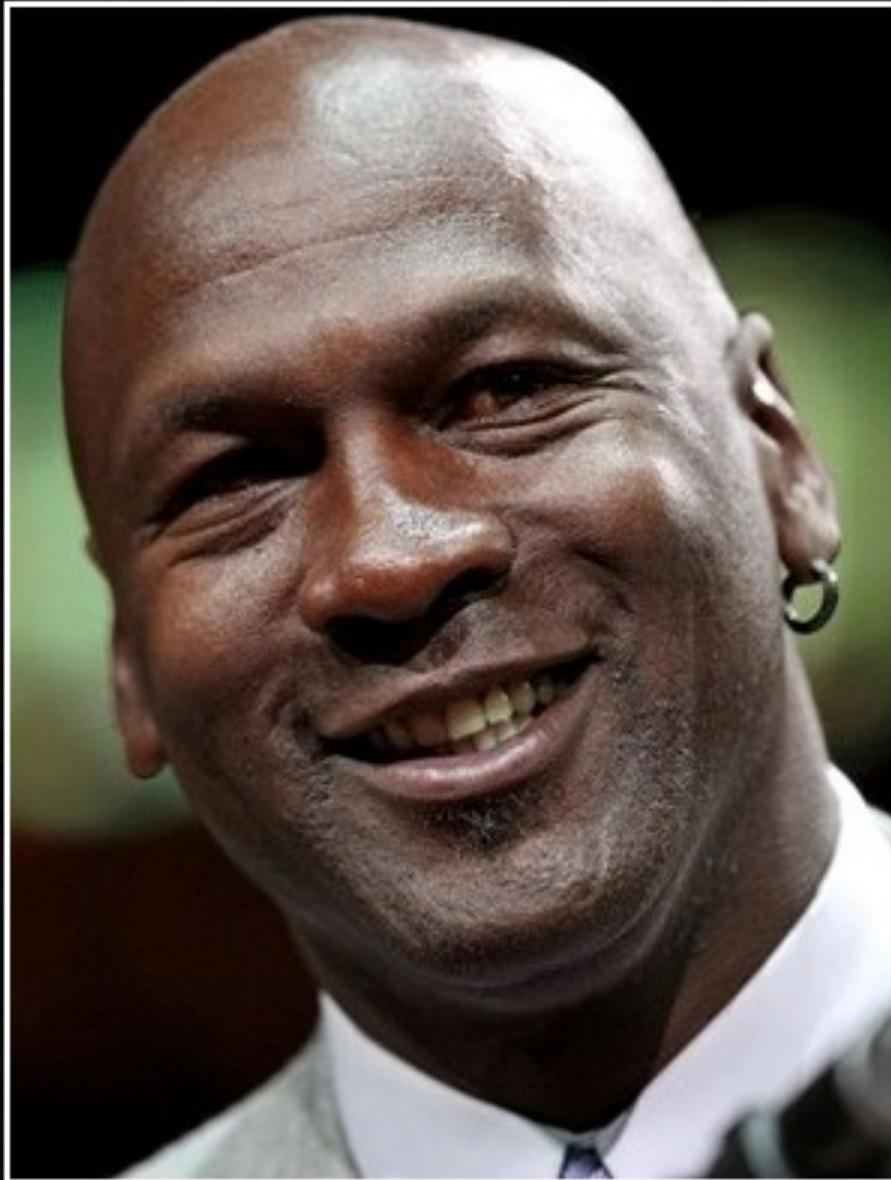
A large, bold, green number '8' is positioned on the left side of the slide. It is composed of two thick, rounded loops, one above the other, with a white circular center in each loop.

Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.

Awareness

- Many leaders are unaware of their blind spots. A Servant Leader Product Owner has the self awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, flaws and feelings.
- This allows them to understand their own personal biases and beliefs when talking with their customers and set them aside when making decisions about the direction of the product.
- So SLPO's are **coachable**.





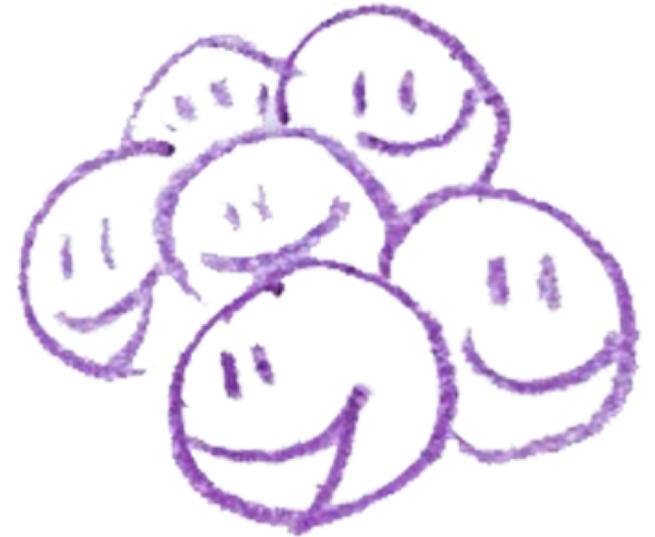
My best skill was that I was coachable. I was a sponge and aggressive to learn.

— *Michael Jordan* —

AZ QUOTES

Persuasion

- The combination of self awareness, listening skills, empathy and support, makes the Servant Leader Product Owner a very persuasive individual.
- This skill is essential in the difficult and complex arena of product management and the associated discussions and negotiations with customers, stakeholders and the leaders of the business itself.
- Negotiator?

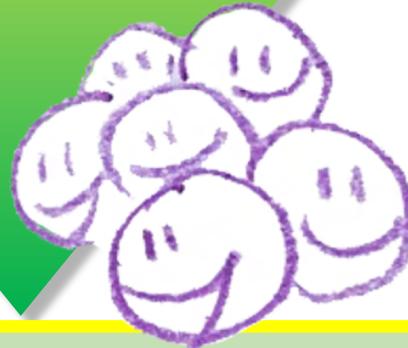




Coercive Power



Manipulative Power



Persuasion as Power

Conceptualization

- A Servant Leader Product Owner has the ability to envision the future, or better, the many possibilities of the future. This does not mean they are dreamers – The ability to imagine these opportunities comes aligned with the ability to practically relate this back to the current reality – and conceptualize the journey in between this old world and the new.
- I see the future and it will be...



- Conceptualize the **PROBLEM?** the **un-met need?**
- Conceptualize the vision of the **future?**
- Conceptualize the *journey?* The **MISSION?**
- The **ANSWER?**
- The **many answers?**
- The **many possible futures?**

Foresight

- Servant Leader Product Owners are empirical. They understand the lessons of the past, the reality of the present and the possible consequences of future. They plan ahead based on the reality they inhabit.



Foresight

- Servant Leader Product Owners are empirical. They understand the lessons of the past, the reality of the present and the possible consequences of future. They plan ahead based on the reality they inhabit.
- AKA Scrummy!



I  ROADMAPS

I  TRAIN TRACKS

Stewardship

- Accepts ownership but does not abuse it.
- Understands they are cultivating and growing this product for all stakeholders, whether individual, team, organization, customers, partners, community, or even society as a whole.
- Like a gardener who plants trees for the next generation.



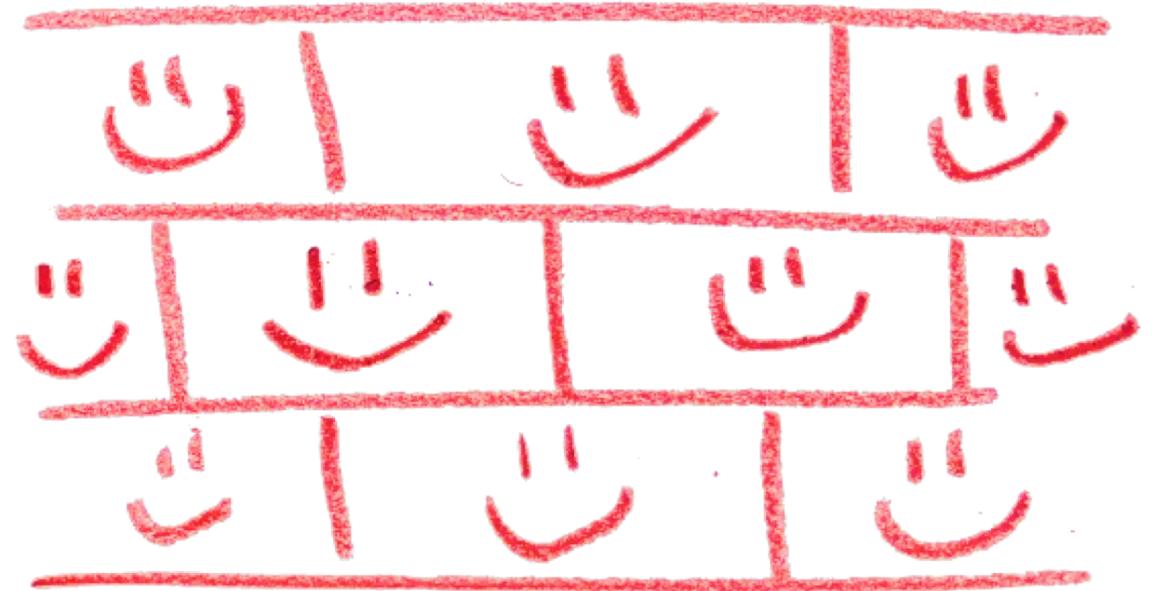
Helping People Grow

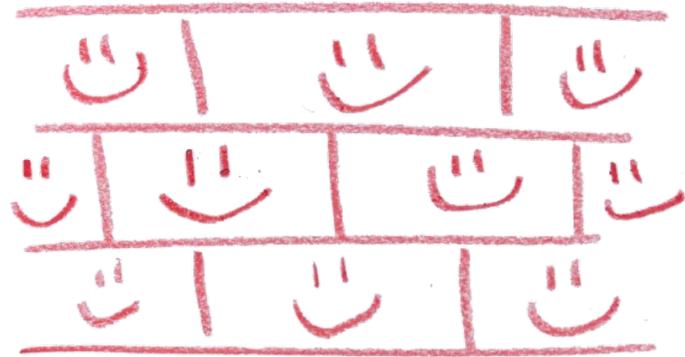
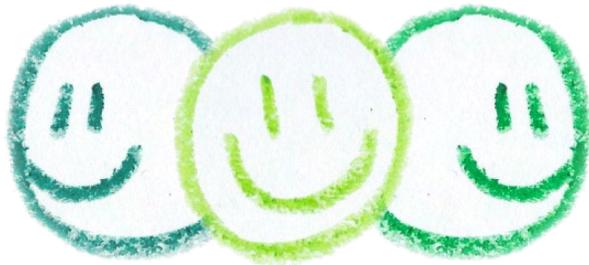
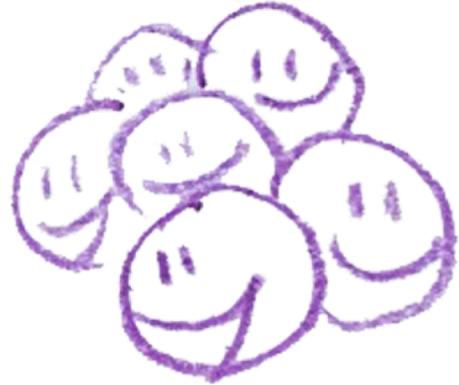
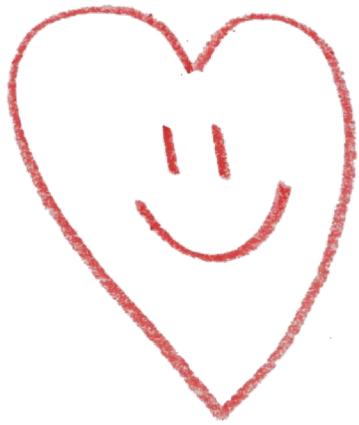
- The Servant Leader Product Owner understands that the Product is not just the code.
- It's not just the documentation.
- It's the entire ecosystem.
- Including the development team.
- The SLPO cultivates and nurtures the teams they work with.
- Not exploitative – the development team is always in the mind of the PO as they help them grow and discover their abilities and skills in the **problem space** where the PO lives.
- This enables the team to handle more situations and ambiguity, which grows the product more successfully and themselves.



Community Builder

- Under a Servant Leader Product Owner, people come together for a common purpose. They are able to create a feeling of belonging to something bigger than each individual, and foster team spirit and a sense of community. Servant leaders also deeply care for this community that they create.
- This will be exhibited both in the sense of direction and camaraderie of the development team
- The user community will feel unified.
- And Stakeholders will feel a **genuine** stake in the product.





Joe Iarocci: *Servant Leadership in the Workplace*

- **3 Key Priorities**

- Developing people, Building a trusting team, Achieving results.

- **3 Key Principles**

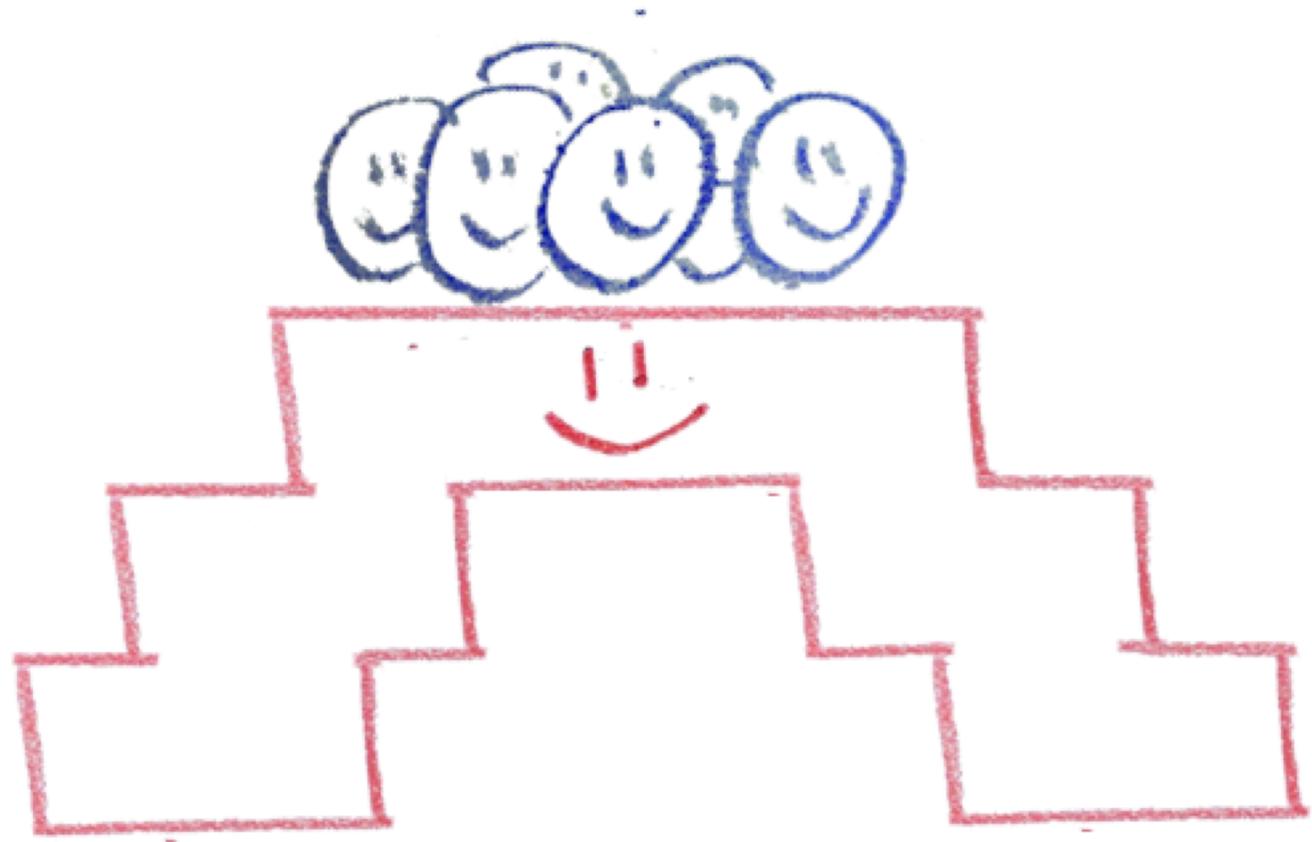
- Serve first, Persuasion, Empowerment.

- **3 Key Practices**

- Listening, Delegating, **Connecting followers to mission.**



Connecting Followers To Mission



Kent Keith: *The Case for Servant Leadership*

- Self-awareness
- Listening
- **Changing the pyramid**
- Developing your colleagues
- Coaching not controlling
- Unleashing the energy and intelligence of others
- Foresight

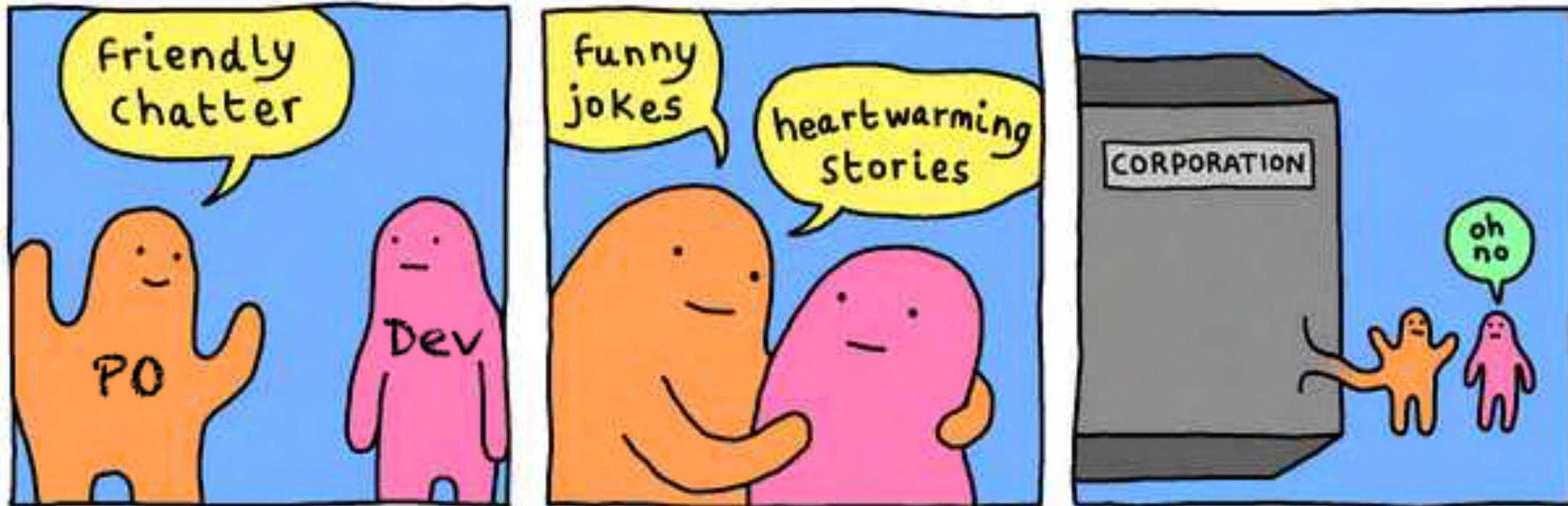
Seven Key Practices of Servant Leaders

Changing the Pyramid.

- Product Owner is a **CHANGE AGENT**
- Both in product terms
- AND Organisational terms
- Servant Leader PO's creates **teams**



BUSINESSES ON Product Owners



Agile edits by me - Original comic by webcomicname.com

James Sipe and Don Frick: *The Seven Pillars of Servant Leadership*

- **Person of character**
- Put people first
- Skilled communicators
- Compassionate collaborators
- Use foresight
- **Systems thinkers**
- **Exercise “*Moral Authority*”**

Person of character, Exercise Moral Authority

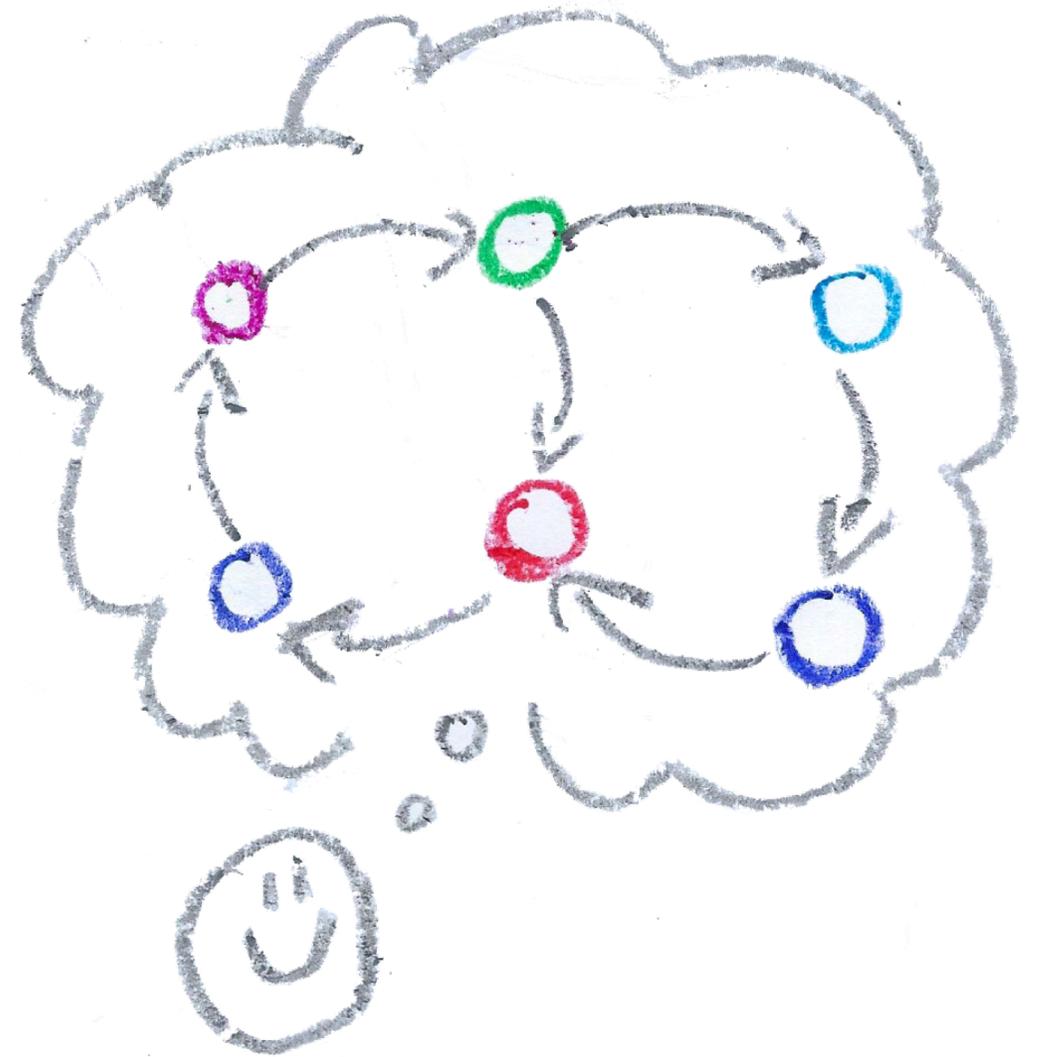
- Having personal convictions
- Behavior consistent with convictions
- A persuasive *life*.
- Maintain integrity
- Demonstrate humility
- Serve a higher purpose than themselves.



“**Humility** is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less.” – CS Lewis

System Thinker

- A servant-leader sees life in all its glorious messiness without all the loose ends tied up in neat, simplistic bows.
 - *“One must learn to live peacefully and sleep well with a submerged awareness of constant danger”* (Robert Greenleaf, as cited in Sipe & Frick, pg. 137, 2009).
- A servant-leader loves the sheer beauty of this world. Servant-leaders cultivate a heightened sense of awareness and are able to see the connections between history, people, events, possibilities, and deep intuition.
- A servant-leader deeply understands that ethical conduct is central to seeing things whole.



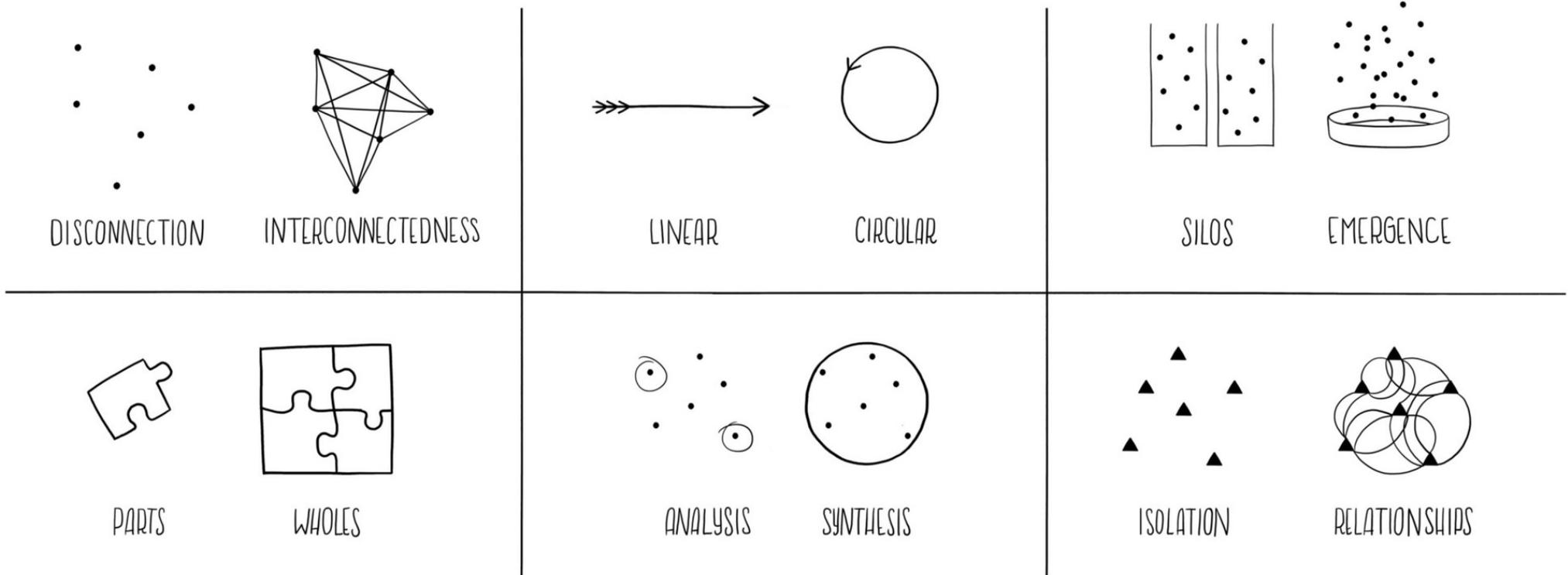
EVENTS

PATTERNS

STRUCTURES

MENTAL MODELS

TOOLS OF A SYSTEM THINKER



<https://medium.com/disruptive-design/tools-for-systems-thinkers-the-6-fundamental-concepts-of-systems-thinking-379cdac3dc6a>





<https://less.works/less/principles/systems-thinking.html>

Concerns

- Could a SLPO model be used as an excuse for *"weak product ownership"*? (AKA BA reborn)
- A common anti-pattern is Product Owners with **EQ** stepping into the ScrumMaster space to support insufficient or weak ScrumMasters.
 - *(Being a Servant Leader does not mean usurping other Servant Leaders)*



Servant Leader Product Ownership

- SLPO Requires **S L P O**
- First **P** (*Conceptualization*)
- Then **O** (*Stewardship*)
- Then **S** (*Healing, Awareness, Listening, Empathy, Helping People Grow*)
- Finally **L** (*Community Builder, Change the Pyramid, System Thinker, Person of Character, Exercise Moral Authority, Connecting Followers to Mission, Foresight*)
- GOTO **P**

Conclusion:

- By taking on the aspects of servant leadership we can be more effective leaders of product.
- It does not mean lack of vision.
- Or lack of decision making
- But an inclusive, persuasive approach that enables and inspires and catalyses' teams of people into great results.
- Whether those teams are **developers**, or **stakeholders** or **USERS!**

Upcoming Events MARK YOUR DIARIES!

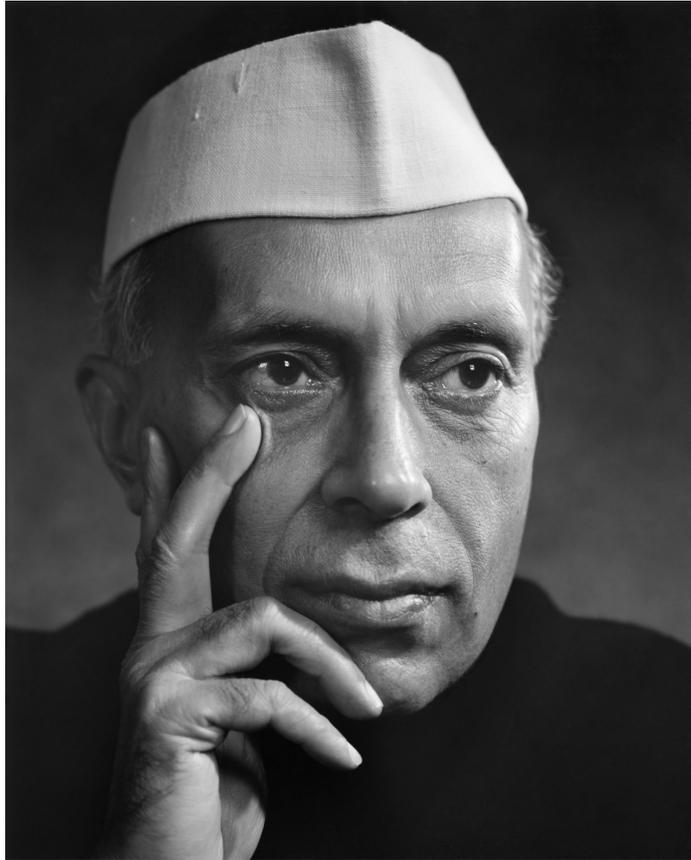
2018 UK Conference

Embodying Servant-Leadership

Friends House, 173-177, Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ

Oct 30 & 31st - 2 day conference

[**Click here to register**](#)



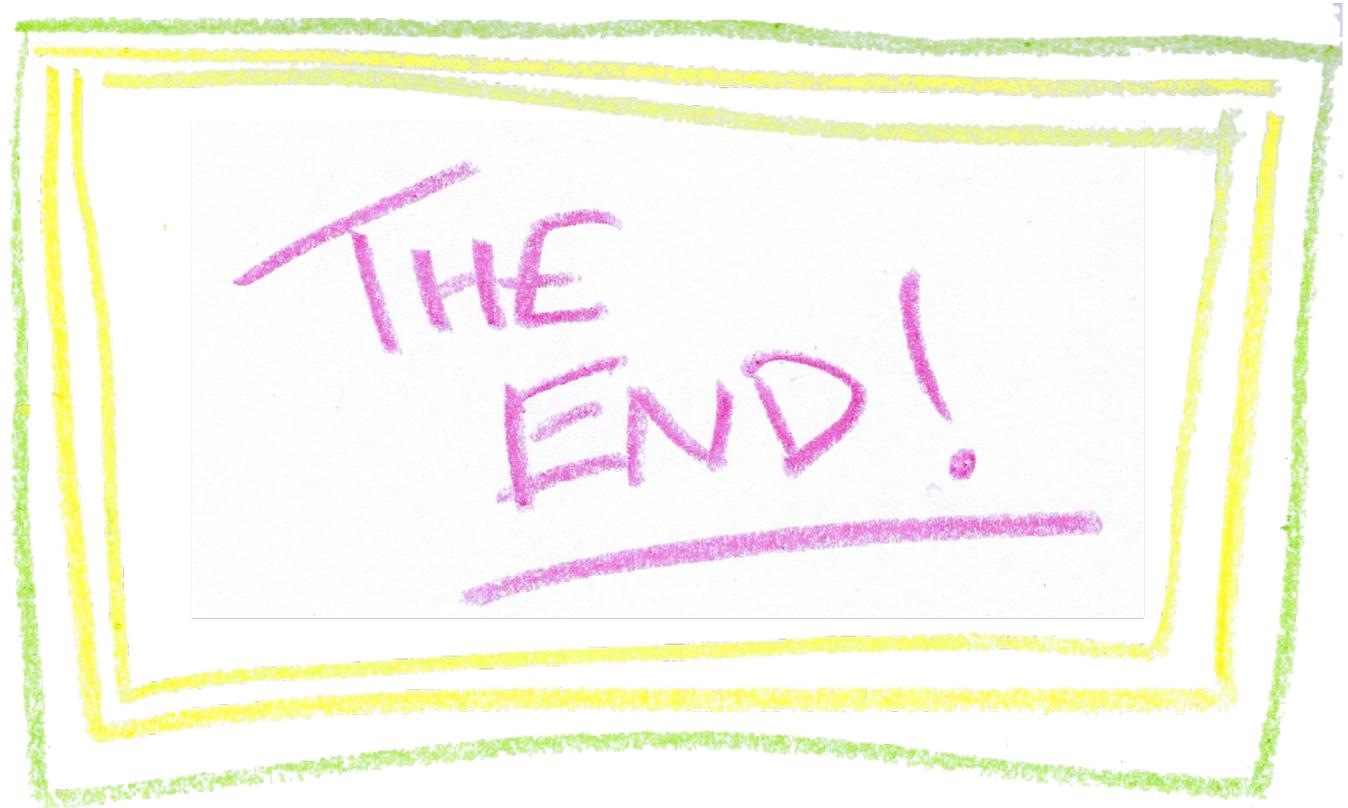
“I have always thought that the best way to find out what is right and what is not right, what should be done and what should not be done, is not to give a sermon, but to talk and discuss, and out of discussion sometimes a little bit of truth comes out.”

— Jawaharlal Nehru

So lets embrace Servant Leadership....

Q&A – And you define the *A* as well as the *Q*!

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Please stop me to discuss this or anything else at any point in the Gathering!