

## Hiring For an Agile Team – Session Notes

On Wednesday October 28<sup>th</sup> the Calgary APLN meeting was a panel discussion on “Hiring for an agile team.” We had a panel of five experts representing the hiring perspectives of Project Managers, Architects, Testers, Business Analysts, and Developers. The panel was comprised of:

- **Janice Aston (Project Manager)**
  - Janice is an Agile project manager and coach currently working as an independent consultant. She is passionate about building high performing teams and delivering business value.
- **Gerard Meszaros (Solution Architect)**
  - Gerard is an agile trainer and coach. He trains and coaches agile development teams on how to do agile better through better software design, design for testability, test automation and refactoring. He trains and coaches project managers, architects and business people on how to be good product owners by breaking functionality down into small, incremental user stories. He has just returned from Denmark where he was an invited speaker at the JA00 conference. He has played the role of Solution Architect on several agile projects.
- **Jennitta Andrea (Tester)**
  - Jennitta has been actively engaged on a variety of different agile projects in Calgary as a hands-on practitioner (analyst, tester), consultant (retrospectives, assessments), and instructor. Her writing and conference presentations have brought international recognition as a thought leader in the area of agile requirements and test driven development.
- **John Johnston (Business Analyst)**
  - John is a BA and Agile coach at ThoughtWorks. He is particularly interested in finding ways to make agile and user centered design work together. Right now he wants to know more about Lean and Kanban systems.
- **Dustin Aleksiuik (Developer)**
  - Dustin is a Calgary independent software developer and consultant. He has been using agile methods in various roles for the last 9 years.

The following are high level notes on some of the characteristics to look for in the various roles of an agile team:

### Janice Aston (Project Manager)

As project manager I empower my team to assess technical skills and proficiencies, instead I focus on looking for the **Common Characteristics** of:

**Collaboration** – can work well with others

**Humility** – not a prima donna

**Reflective** – Having a natural tendency to review and consider actions and outcomes

Willing to improve – always looking to get better and advance

**Adaptive/flexible** – willing to shift gears, tasks and roles

**Risk tolerant** – willing to try new things, roles, approaches

**Take responsibility / self motivated** – does not need hand-holding or close supervision  
**Happy in open/busy environment** – does not expect their own office, able to work in a busy, noisy environment  
**Pragmatic** – practical, realistic and not idealistic about approaches or principles  
Work incrementally – can start work without knowing all the steps in the process  
**Fit with culture / balance with team** – they must be a good fit for the organization and team

We can find these people by:  
Asking situational questions “Tell me a time when...”  
Enquiring about their Interests/desires

### **Gerard Meszaros (Solution Architect)**

**Avoid part time architects** – just 10% of someone is never effective  
**Get them involved in project** – we do not want drive-by-architecture  
**Look for people who want to be involved throughout, including delivery** – this is where we learn if the recommendations really work  
**We want architects to work hands on with developers**  
Keeps architects pragmatic  
Good for developers’ career progression  
**Humility** – someone reasonable and approachable  
**Pragmatism** – practical and realistic about technology  
**Collaboration** – willing to work with all stakeholders  
**Communication skills** – can communicate ideas and explain complex topics to both technical people and non-technical alike  
**Player-Coach** - comfortable and productive in both roles  
**Good architects should be more like a Motor, not anchor, pulling the team towards goal.** i.e. helping propel the team towards the right solution than acting as an anchor slowing progress towards the end goal.  
Can use situational interviewing techniques to find out how an architect might behave in typical agile situations (do need to start building without a full architecture defined...)

### **Jennitta Andrea (Tester)**

**Multi disciplinary** – the roles on an agile team blur more  
**Less specialists** – looking for people willing to share roles  
**Spread testing into other roles** – looking for spread the QA concepts out to BA’s, developers and project managers  
**Not just testing functionality, instead elevating QA within the process** – since the basic functional testing should be handled via unit tests , testers can look to improve quality in all functions of the team  
**Critical thinking skills** – looking for areas to improve  
**Strengths in other types of testing-** For example , load testing, performance testing, etc  
**Knowledge of test frameworks** – Fit, Fitness, Twist, Watir  
**Knowledgeable in how to use QA to change process** – improving quality in all activities undertaken  
**Understanding of impacts of TDD** – to other project practices  
**Work with users to create tests** – good communication skills, collaboration skills, facilitation skills

## **John Johnston (Business Analyst)**

**Facilitator/enabler** – the bridge between technical and the business

**Promotes communication** – always strengthening the dialog to the business

**Appreciation of user centred design** - e.g. the use of personas and low-fi research approaches

**Look for people who ask a lot of “Why?” type questions** – showing an interest in the business

One good interview exercise is to ask representatives to take part in a cases study exercise. Ask them to prepare an agenda for workshop with the business

Look for a business interest, look for the “why” type questions, see that they are getting to the bottom of the business reasons as to why do the project.

**Work in trenches** – must be willing to work closely alongside other roles

**Realistic about the challenges of agile** – not idealists

## **Dustin Aleksiuik (Developer)**

Through observation of many developers, surprisingly the very best developers are not necessarily:

- Bloggers

- Agile zealots

- TDD proponents

- Open-source contributors or evening coders

Instead they seem to have skills that are hard to interview for. However:

**Look for strong OO skills, and patterns experience** – agile projects have lots of changes and refactoring, a solid design is important to allow for the inevitable changes

**In addition to technical coding, environment skills/tools are important** - for instance how to set up, build servers, databases, etc

**Unit test experience** – an very important skill

**Refactoring skills** – comfortable with changing code

**An interest in the business domain** – to better understand the project priorities and converse with business representatives

**A willingness to embrace change** – be flexible and adaptive

So how do we interview developers?:

- Rapid fire questions are good for checking technical knowledge

- Yet, many skills hard to test for, and we may need to try people in a role for a while