



How Being "Hippy Dippy" Can Help You Be a More Productive Agile Team

by Guest Contributor (<https://www.ca.com/en/blog-agile-central/author/guestcontributor>) July 12, 2018

About a year ago, I was working somewhere other than CA Agile Central (<https://www.ca.com/us/products/ca-agile-central.html>), on two scrum teams. Times were hard for both teams. The details are many but all you need to know is both teams faced challenging circumstances outside their control.

One team, who'd always been good at team building, was committed to still doing Agile as best they could. We continued to work and play well together. Because of that, morale and productivity stayed up.



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The other team, who were "all business," gradually abandoned many of our Agile ceremonies, including any team building. As a result, morale and productivity dropped.

I felt bad about my role in that drop even after I left that position. I wondered, what could we have done differently?

When I joined CA Agile Central, I was thrilled to see teams all around me with the kind of "mojo" that my "happy" old team had held onto. And I was inspired to discover from them how I could help our customers' teams – and myself – to find and keep our mojo, especially in hard times.

I started by googling, "why do people give up on Agile?" I got 11,400,000 results! One of the most helpful was [Why People Give Up on Agile – and Why You Shouldn't](https://www.ca.com/en/blog-highlight/people-give-up-agile.html) (https://www.ca.com/en/blog-highlight/people-give-up-agile.html), by Bob Winter. In it, Bob lists six reasons why people give up on Agile.

Reason #6 reminded me of my "sad" old team: "The more I read up on Agile...the more I think these Agile people are living in La-La Land. Collaboration and teamwork are cool, but business is not a place for rainbows and unicorns."

Bob says in reply, "Teams and projects fail because of human factors and systemic issues in the environment. Agile asks you to examine those conditions and work together to fix the things that are holding the team back. Sure, that might involve talk of rainbows and unicorns, but you'll see with experience that trust, collaboration, and humanity are the keys to the kingdom."

"Okay, Bob," I thought, "what does that look like in the real world?"

So, in my real CA Agile Central world, I turned to a Scrum Master whom I admire for her positivity but also for her ability to get stuff done: Cassie Kern.

I asked Cassie a few questions:

J Burton – "Some people think that Agile is too 'hippy dippy' what would say to that?"

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Cassie Kern – “I think that there’s a balance, right? I think part of the reason that we get that ‘hippy dippy’ reputation is, at least in my experience, that it’s more fun working on a scrum team than it is working on a more traditional development team. When you’re having more fun at your job, you’ll just naturally be a little bit more positive and a little bit ‘hippy dippy’, which, frankly, I kind of like. I think as long as you’re okay still having tough conversations and not just having ‘groupthink’ because you’re all best buddies on your team, I think that is definitely important.”

J Burton – “Tell me how you balance positive energy on a team while encouraging people to think independently and to raise concerns.”

Cassie Kern – “I’m naturally a positive person. I enjoy doing more when I have that kind of attitude. For me, as a Scrum Master, it is important for me to encourage other people on my team to do that. That’s because I feel like when your teammates have a more positive attitude, it helps you get to know them better because it’s more welcoming. And I feel like, as the team gets to know each other on a more personal level, you’re more able to solve hard problems together.

I think that if you’re generally an optimistic team, if you like being around each other, you’re willing to tackle these really hard things. You don’t think to yourself, ‘Oh, this is going to be so tedious. Not only is this going to be a hard problem but, man, I really don’t like working with these people. So, it’s just going to make it all worse’. If you enjoy working together I think you’re more willing to *dig in* on something that maybe other teams wouldn’t want to even *touch*.”

J Burton – “So would you say that team building is really crucial to enable people to have difficult conversations?”

Cassie Kern – “Yes, definitely. I think that team building gets a bad name because a lot of times it’s sort of dictated from the top down. It’s like ‘You must do this team building and you will be a better team’. But when it is more driven by a team, I think it’s great.

We at CA Agile Central do something every quarter as a team. It’s really up to the team to drive what we want to do. Just yesterday our team went and did a glass blowing class. Just do something out of the office, fun, that gets you talking

to each other outside of a work context because if you know someone better you're more willing to solve hard problems with them. I think it's this cycle that you keep going until you make yourself a really awesome team, a team that you enjoy working on."

J Burton – "Do you feel like if people have a more complete view of each other as human beings that if someone raises an objection maybe the emotions don't run quite so high?"

Cassie Kern – "Yeah, absolutely. And I think also if you just get to know someone more completely, their whole personality, you might have more empathy into why they might raise a concern like that. Maybe you know about an experience they've had in the past where this really came back to bite them; so, you become more willing to have that conversation, to ask questions: 'Why do you feel that way?' 'What in your past is telling you that it might be a problem?' It can help you to have a discussion like, 'I did this thing in the past and it worked out great. But we should talk about what went wrong when you did it'. It makes having those conversations easier when you feel more comfortable with people."

J Burton – "Are there other resources that you would point new Agile users to?"

Cassie Kern – "Well, I think one place that a lot of Agile teams start to build trust is in retrospectives. And there's a great retro book that's called *Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great* by Diana Larsen. I know a lot of Scrum Masters have read that book.

There's such a variety of ways that you can structure a retrospective. I think that, especially with developers, they are such creative people that you have to find a way to unlock that. You switch it up so that you're essentially getting at the same thing but using different ways of asking the questions that gets their brains working in different ways. And you can start to have really good conversations."

J Burton – "Finally, what would you say to people like on my 'sad' old team who, when times get hard, are tempted to give up Agile because they're just so busy and maybe feeling less positive than usual?"

Cassie Kern – “Hmm, I’m not sure I’ve been in a situation where teams have wanted to skip ceremonies. I think that no matter the circumstances, communication within your team is still important. Even if there is a major blocker, there is always other work that can still be done that will add value and these should be discussed in standup or retro.

In a situation where there’s a lot of pressure coming from outside of the team, it’s important that the Scrum Master, product owner, and dev manager take on that burden and do their best to keep the team from being bogged down by it. *Everyone* knows if there are important milestones coming up; and having outside influences bugging the team about it just slows them down more.

It’s also important to remember that a quick daily standup actually prevents other meetings because the team is able to ensure they are aligned for the day. Taking an hour out of your sprint to do a retro can actually lead to improvements that will streamline work. I think that tossing these ceremonies to the side would actually cause the team to slow down more.”

J Burton – “I agree. Thanks, Cassie!”

Cassie Kern – “You’re welcome!”

When we finished the interview, Cassie and I went to lunch with the Lean-In group at CA Agile Central, which was followed by a quarterly CA Agile Central celebration for all teams at a Colorado Rockies game. Even as an introvert, I find our team building and intra-team building traditions at CA Agile Central make me a happier camper *and*, because of the relationships that I’ve developed, a more efficient worker when it comes to getting stuff done. If that makes Agile “hippy dippy,” then I say, pass the granola!

About the Author:

As a former English major and life-long “word nerd,” J. Burton is keenly interested in the ways that language and technology intersect. Before joining CA Technologies, as an Information Engineer with CA Agile Central, she worked as a transcriber (using voice recognition software when it was in its awkward

infancy), TA'ed business writing courses for engineers, and taught both "comp" and creative writing to students of all majors.



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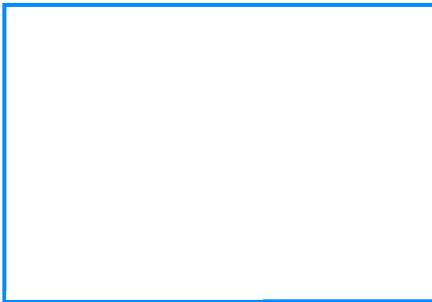
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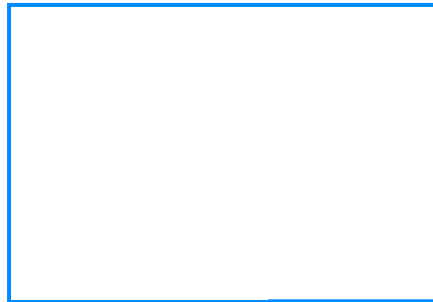
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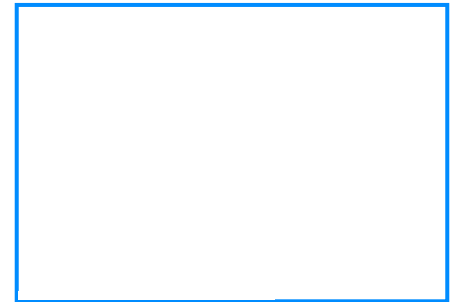
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