



# The 5 Roles of Everyday Agile Leaders: Before, During & After COVID

**Learning Guide**

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Crises serve as nasty reminders of fundamental truths which are easy to forget in the best of times and wakeup calls in the worst of times. One truth that is probably front of mind for you right now during the COVID crisis is, “It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent. It is the most adaptable to change” (Charles Darwin).

## **Before COVID**

For nearly 20 years before the COVID crisis, we exchanged Darwin’s “most adaptable to change” wording with the brevity of the “agile”, adopted in 2001 with the “Agile Manifesto” for agile software development.

Ever since, you have probably noticed an expanding universe of agility insights and inspiration. It is cluttered with an army of agile software development evangelists with a confusing array of competing methodologies, digital transformation case studies typically of larger corporations like banks and retail giants, big consultancy houses with agility practices pushing out research, books and magazine articles and classical coaches, consultants and trainers hitching their wagon to the agile train!

As a result, it can be hard to relate to, particularly for CEOs of small to medium sized enterprises. Which means enterprise agility can remain as elusive as it ever has been, as an unbroken code of the myths, mysteries and magic of agility. It is a myth that small-to-medium sized enterprises are naturally agile. They aren’t. They are naturally frenetic. There is a world of difference.

That was my experience as a CEO of mid-market companies. In an ever faster changing world, I developed a growing sense that nobody seemed to understand what it was like to sit in the driver’s seat of my business, where I faced agility challenges every day. I knew that I might have to wait a long time for others to fill the void, so I decided to fill it myself.

## **The 5 Attributes of Agility to Change Your Relationship With.**

My instincts drew me to study the secrets of leaders who experience agility challenges every day in the real world, often with life and death consequences. Fighter pilots, special forces, fire fighters and others.

I had a role like that in my early twenties, as a Petroleum Engineer working on offshore oil and gas drilling rigs. It was a great real world experience and I realize now that I connected with the realities of agility which never left me. They intuitively informed my career in the business world as an executive and CEO and then in the advisory world as a consultant, facilitator and coach, across a wide diversity of businesses and industries.

Accumulating insights at the intersection of those three worlds, I now find myself interpreting agility secrets from the real world, translating them into terms relevant to the business world, in ways that can be facilitated effectively in the advisory world.

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There are 5 key attributes of agility to change your relationship with – an imperative now during COVID and likely even more so post-COVID.

1. **Chaos.** With the speed and turbulence of change we experience these days, chaos is the #1 problem in business. Few people have had any coaching about chaos and, as a result, can easily get stuck in chronic disorganized-chaos and crisis management. You must be the Chief Chaos-Coach in your business, coaching your people to change their relationship with chaos, moving from disorganized-chaos to organized-chaos. These are two very different worlds. You don't want your airline pilot to be working in disorganized chaos and you mustn't be either.

2. **Triage.** The antidote to chaos is triage. This is the most acute form of time management, priority management, resource management and attention management, in a real-time unfolding, high stakes journey of a situation like a dog fight, or a special forces mission or an offshore oil & gas drilling rig. These are situations in which you get few second chances. Few people have had any facilitation of triage and, as a result, can easily get stuck in partial-triage, triaging inside of partial situational awareness, not full-triage inside of full situational awareness. You must be the Chief Triage Facilitator in your business, facilitating your people to change their relationship with triage. You don't want your ER doctor to be partially triaging and you mustn't be either.

3. **Insight.** The secret of good triage is to learn as much as possible about an unfolding situation from foresight rather than from hindsight. Hindsight is so much more expensive and sometimes with life-and-death consequences. Few people have had any training about learning from foresight and, as a result, can easily get stuck in learning from hindsight. You must be the Chief Insight Trainer in your business, training your people to change their relationship with insight.

4. **Luck.** If we have been learning from foresight, we are more likely to experience good luck by design rather than bad luck by accident. Luck is a lot less random than we think. If we think about it in terms of "luck is where preparation meets opportunity," we're far less likely to be caught flat-footed and under prepared. You must be the Chief Luck Consultant in your business, with all the phrases and quotations at your fingertips, to help your people change their relationship with luck.

5. **Journey-Orientation.** The bottom-line is the journey trajectory of your business, your profitability and growth, and your career and life. It is simultaneously an unfolding flow from the present forwards and the future backwards, of the knowable and the unknowable, of the macroscopic (the big picture) and the microscopic (the small details). Micromanagement has a bad reputation in business, but any agile leader in the real world will tell you that there is a world of difference between bad micromanagement and good micromanagement. You must be the Chief Journey Architect in your business, helping your people change their relationship with the journey.

## Chief Agility Officer

Like it or lump it, you are the chief agility officer of your business. Trust me, if you don't step up to these 5 roles of everyday agile leaders, to change your relationship with these key attributes of agility, you risk that no one else will.

Which camp are you in? Fragility begets more fragility, as a self-defeating, vicious cycle and downwards spiral of disorganized-chaos, partial-triage, learning from hindsight, bad luck by accident and bad micromanagement, all feeding on each other. Agility begets more agility, as a self-fulfilling, virtuous cycle and upwards spiral of organized-chaos, full-triage, learning from foresight, good luck by design and good micromanagement, all feeding on each other. What is your leadership presence? Fragile or agile? Become a student of agility.