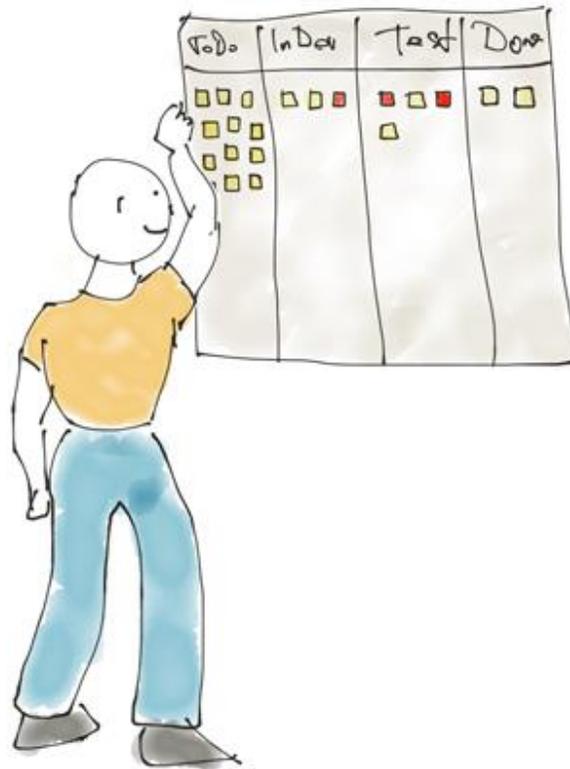


# HOW TO GET A SCRUM MASTER JOB, TL; DR



Dmitri Iarandine

# How to Get A Scrum Master Job - “TL;DR” Edition

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# Introduction

## “TL;DR”

Literally – “Too long; Didn't read”

A phrase usually typed in response to a blog, forum post, or other form of online media to express that the text was needlessly long, and they didn't end up reading all of it.

- *Urban Dictionary*

Hello, and thanks for picking up the book! Let me give you some quick background to this book's creation, and explain what “**TL;DR**” means in this context.

I've transitioned into Agile Delivery and Project Management space from being a Software Engineer about 5 years ago. First I found myself in a hybrid capacity of an Agile Business Analyst / Digital Producer, and eventually became an Iteration Manager / Agile Coach at a large Australian Telco.

Now I also consult individuals and organisations on the most optimal screening and recruitment methods for hiring highly qualified Agile professionals.

For the good part of the last 5 years I've been collecting and documenting my own experiences as a transitioning professional and a job seeker. I attended meet-ups, talked to already established and a lot more experienced Agile practitioners, including Scrum Masters, Iteration Managers, Agile Coaches, and people specialising in Agile Recruitment. I've been interviewed on many occasions, and I've interviewed a lot of applicants myself since then.

It left me with a ton of notes, bookmarks, audio logs, and scribbles of all shapes and forms.

Not so long ago I've finally decided to “*go public*”, and turn all those notes into some sort of helpful readable material for those of you out there who are considering to embark on a similar professional transitioning journey. This effort resulted in my recently published eBook - [GET HIRED as SCRUM MASTER](#) - that you can find on Amazon.

My goal was to *pack the book with practical information* that one wouldn't find elsewhere, calling spade a spade, and making sure a freshly baked Scrum Master knows what to expect from the current job market, preparing properly, and being ready for most common challenges each and every one of us - *job seekers* - experiences on their path.

In spite of all my efforts to trim the contents to only what I thought the reader really needs, the original book turned out to be rather long, with a lot of context being given for each topic, and some parts appearing to be optional and for “advanced applicants only”.

I've received a lot of positive feedback, but about the same amount of people actually commented that the original book was too long, and a shorter "**TL;DR version**" would be useful as well. Which is why I decided to write this shorter "*How To Get A Scrum Master Job*" eBook, and give it out for Free.

This eBook is **NOT** just a collection of outtakes from the original [GET HIRED as SCRUM MASTER](#).

**First of all**, having published that book on Amazon, I actually am not allowed to simply copy out bits and pieces and republish them elsewhere, even being the book's author, at least at the moment of writing these lines, while I'm bound by Amazon's exclusivity clause.

**Secondly**, *I didn't want to diminish the value of the original book* by telling you exactly the same things, or just phrasing it all differently.

In other words, this is a completely new stand-alone book, where I talk about most essential concepts of the same topic - *getting that Scrum Master (or any other Agile Delivery) role as a fresh person* to the job market within our Industry.

And I sincerely hope that you find this material helpful, enjoying **both** books equally - like the main course meal, followed by a dessert. Or the other way around, if you prefer it that way...

Your feedback is always welcome,

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# Modern Agile Job Market

Having worked in Russia, Switzerland and Australia, most of my experience comes from the competitive Australian Job Market, which might be different to where you are based.

I do believe however that I describe generic modern recruitment and job hunting problems that should be common around the World, and sincerely hope that reading my take on the main issues would be worth your while regardless.

In the eyes of a job seeker and a fresh applicant, Australian Agile Delivery and Project Management Job Market suffers from the following dominating trends:

## Picky Recruiters

Recruiters down-under are picky because highly qualified workforce is concentrated in a handful of major cities, creating an overwhelming demand for well-paying professional jobs within Agile Delivery space. There's plenty of jobs out there, and the market is still (*apparently*) growing, but there's always more candidates than jobs. That's a given you have to accept and work with.

Our local recruiters are spoiled by the amount of good candidates, which makes their choice and candidate placement *relatively effortless* - not always, of course. In majority of cases it is true though, when we are talking about Scrum Master positions that are usually in high demand, and limited supply.

These days recruiters' job is also made easier by ever-growing candidate databases, and instant access to hundreds (if not thousands) of profiles on Professional Social Media websites, such as LinkedIn.com.

So naturally, when the market is saturated with good and generally keen candidates, recruiters can pick and choose, and get away with bad practices like not returning your calls, and not bothering to get back to you if your application was unsuccessful. They know you will likely swallow your pride and pick up the phone next time, if they happen to call you a year later to ask if you are still looking...

Yes, it can be that bad - be ready for it, don't let this discourage you though.

## Inflation of Job Requirements

Even if recruiters can't find the right blend of skills that their occasionally picky employer-Client asks for within their candidate database, job requirements you see on the advertisement websites are often **inflated**, raising Scrum Master entry-level to sometimes unreasonable heights.

As a random example - a famous bank might be advertising a position of Scrum Master, asking for 5+ years of experience implementing Scrum, plus 2 types of Scrum Master Certifications, plus proven experience working with Payment systems, and Derivatives knowledge being a bonus.

Even without knowing what kind of job and work environment precisely they have, I can tell you here and now that these job requirements are exaggerated vastly.

Who does that?

Could be the recruiter, could be the actual employer supplying them with a Job Description - *we won't dive into those semi-philosophical matters in this book, try the other one if you're really interested in what I think* - but what matters is that you won't be suited for that even as a competent Scrum Master who spent 2-3 honest years doing exactly what they probably want you to do as your day-to-day job.

People inflate job requirements to overcompensate - they think they need more than they do, and they try and silently negotiate with the market using this basic but not very applicable technique, where you ask for more than you are realistically going to get. It's a "yes, but what if we can get a superstar?..." factor. Visibility of this trend scares a lot of candidates away, but sometimes lures in completely incompetent candidates who are just brave (or foolish - you decide). I've seen more than a few Resumes like that with my own eyes.

## How Does a Fresh SM Get a Job Then?

It's easy when you are part of the game and the "Cool Kids Club" - knowing some recruiters, or having some presence in the industry - but gets obviously much harder when you're outside of that inner circle yet. Getting the job not impossible though, but requires building up that presence, experience, as well as applying the right approach and doing sufficient amount of preparation.

Best approach in becoming a Scrum Master as a professional who transitions from another role is to *seek internal side-movement within a company that you already work for*. You should learn principles of Agile and Scrum, get a certification to back yourself up a bit, and then seek an opportunity to side-step into an acting Scrum Master or Iteration Manager role.

This is best done by openly discussing your desire to cross-skill and try yourself in a new role with your current Manager, active Scrum Master, or Agile Coach. They should know the organisation well enough to suggest a practical direction, and possibility of success in this approach (*provided that your company has sufficient capacity to accommodate your request*) is very high.

If the Best approach to transitioning within your current organisation is not possible, you will need to prepare to go through the front door, as a fresh applicant "from the street". Prepare to face the recruitment music as much as you can, learn as much as you can, make friends in the Industry, try and get recommendations, boost your LinkedIn profile, rewrite your Resume, and hope for the best.

This book and [my training videos](#), are ultimately there to help you on this transitioning journey.

# What Experience Do You Need

You will need to show that you have *practical, hands-on experience* leading a Scrum Team before you'll be seriously considered as a worthy job candidate, who came from the street.

Any amount of practical experience puts you miles ahead of someone who only has a Scrum Certification.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, your best chances to transition into a Scrum Master role come from within your current organisation, unless it has really nothing to do with Digital Delivery, and Agile practices are not really applicable there.

## Specifically:

If you are currently a Software Developer working in a Scrum Team - ask your Scrum Master or Iteration Manager to give you a chance to try yourself in a Scrum Master role. One would argue that you shouldn't ask, and that *your Scrum Master should have offered this opportunity* to anyone willing to skill up in the team, but don't be afraid to ask if they didn't.

If you are currently a Business Analyst - ask the Scrum Master to facilitate Sprint Planning meetings, end to end, as opposed to just presenting the User Stories to the Development Team, effectively acting as a Proxy Product Owner.

As a Product Owner considering a side-step into an Iteration Manager or Scrum Master role, volunteer to step out of your comfort zone and look at everything from the Team's perspective, trying to facilitate actions, meetings, and be there for the Team to remove impediments.

As a Project Manager, talk to the current active Scrum Master and ask to be invited at first as a silent observer into all of the team's routine meetings and Scrum Rituals (as some people insist on calling them). Then volunteer for a rotation as acting Scrum Master - where the actual SM coaches you and gives you a chance to change your viewpoint completely, allowing you to try and embrace different methods of influence and indirect control over Development Team, rather than direct orders and assignments that you might be used to.

As a professional from a different Industry altogether, **consider a middle-step** before actually aiming as high as a Scrum Master.

You may be lucky without one, punching above your weight and succeeding, but you'd arguably see more value from your time and effort investment choosing initial transition into a more straightforward role (with sufficient training), as a Software Development Team member perhaps, or a Business Analyst.

# Is Agile Training Important?

It most certainly is, even for those of us who “learned on the job”.

Obtaining as much information as possible on the subject matter that you are trying to embrace professionally is the most basic and logical thing one can do when planning their transition into any new space. Agile Delivery and Project Management is not different, even though Scrum Master duties specifically are not rocket science, and are relatively easy to understand.

You should read one of the official Scrum Guides back to front, learn and understand [Agile Manifesto](#), seek YouTube training videos where a real person explains to you in plain English what it's all about, follow some of the more prominent and active Agile Influencers on Social Media platforms like Twitter and LinkedIn.

Once you feel confident enough in understanding the core concepts, and how they all fit together, pick one Agile Scrum Master certification, and go for it.

[I have a YouTube video](#) where I give my subjective but educated take on which Agile Scrum Certification would serve you best, and not break your budget. There are plenty of others as well, in case you'd like a “second opinion” on this matter. It's always good to listen to a few people who know what they are talking about, *and then form your own opinion*, which will make you a better prepared and all-rounded job applicant.

In some lucrative cases you might want to seek individual coaching and other forms of help (*e.g. get someone to review of your Resume/CV*), as I know there are people and companies offering those kinds of services, if you decided to hit every stop in your preparation for that job application process.

## Grow Your Professional Social Network

Knowing the right people plays a huge role in getting a job these days, especially in a market as competitive as Agile Delivery - *and I'll say it once again* - at least in Australia.

So getting introduced to better established Agile influencers on Social Media, following them on Twitter and LinkedIn should be someone one should do almost by default, to maximise their chances of even hearing about the right roles appearing on the job market, before those get picked up by more active candidates.

**Connect with Agile practitioners** - especially in your geographic area - on LinkedIn and Twitter. I'm not a huge fan of Facebook, but you might want to try there as well - can't hurt, can it?

Those people can introduce you to more people, or rebroadcast recruitment notes that reach them to you - if they are not interested. This happens very often in our circles.

**Connect with and introduce yourself to professional recruiters**, who specialise in hiring Agile personnel. I know a lot of professional Agile recruiters personally, and a lot of them are good people, who obviously look after their own interests first, but are willing to help when they can.

You can find their details openly on LinkedIn, or listed as part of Job Ads on most Job Search websites. Remember that most jobs entering the market hit them first, which is why they should be your first point of contact for a new role - in the most obvious and traditional way, as it's been for years.

Arranging a quick coffee with a recruiter before the actual job you are interested in even hits the market is also valuable as time-saving method, because when it's "go-time", you'd be able to jump straight past the initial recruiter screening phase into asking them to present your Resume to their hiring Client, and see if they shortlist you for the face-to-face interviews with the hiring manager.

A lot of this phase is about optimising your time and becoming more efficient at communicating with the right people, at the right time. This opens a lot of doors.

## Try Smaller Companies First

In your job search you will rarely deal with the hiring company directly straight away, unless you are going for job advertisements placed by smaller start-up companies, rather than a role advertised by a well-established and larger organisation.

**Speaking of smaller start-ups** - applying for a role at one of those to start your Scrum Master career might actually be a good idea, because a lot of those are willing to give a professional with less Agile leadership experience a go, if the candidate shows other talents or practical achievements in professional areas that the interviewer or hiring manager considers useful to their smaller company.

So take it as a little tip if you will, and something that could significantly boost your success chances as a professional who is fresh to Agile Delivery space. *Don't hunt for big company names straight away.*

Larger companies almost always have a preceding layer of external professional recruiters, who specialise in hiring Agile professionals, already have a good database of proven candidates they may have placed elsewhere previously, as well as just knowledge and skills required to ask the right questions, and look for the right personality traits during applicant screening process.

The trick here would be to get past that initial recruitment "filter", which often is exaggerated beyond what's realistically needed to perform the role itself, in order to get the top candidates, scaring mid-range and low-end.

That is usually done by sending the recruiter clear messages about your professional level and skills, via well-presented and formulated Cover Letter and Resume. Once you are past that "paper-based" screening process, you'd better be able to back it all up at the face-to-face screening interview (sometimes those are done over the phone as well).

If you are successfully short-listed for the interview with the actual hiring company that external recruiter was representing, it's the time to put your best tie on, and face the music. Often several rounds of it.

In this TL;DR version of my book we will go over the main points on how to keep your head in the game and not feel discouraged by the generally exhausting nature of what an average applicant goes through.

## Agile Cover Letter and Resume

Both Cover Letter and Resume are important documents on the path to your success within the new Industry. Keep both clean, short, based on the Job Description that you've reviewed, and tailored for the specific organisation you are sending those to.

Aim to answer recruiter's questions before they get to ask them in person, as if you don't - that personal interview moment might never happen.

### Cover Letter

Needs to be tailored for the specific Job Advert you are responding to. Aim to find out the name of the recruiter, and address them personally. Have professional clean presentation of your Cover Letter, have it dated, state your thoughts clearly and concisely.

Quickly address why you are applying for this job. Follow with explaining what qualifications and experience you have that make you believe that you are a good candidates. Those better match the requirements listed in the Job Ad and Description, if you've received one. Be confident but not arrogant. Suggest that recruiter reviews your attached Resume for more information about your experience and prior career achievements.

### Scrum Master Resume

General presentation rules apply here as well; your Resume needs to be clean, not fancy, concise (keep it under 2 pages, e.g. remove and trim mentions of old and irrelevant roles) and basically tell the recruiter *within 15 seconds* why you would be a value to the hiring company.

Include your Personal Profile, Qualifications, Education, Summary of Key Skills relevant to the Scrum Master role you are applying for, followed by well formatted and not too watered down list of your most recent roles. You can include key achievements in the listing, where applicable.

Format is ultimately up to you, but it has to be very clear, easy to navigate and follow logically. There are plenty of professional Resume templates available on the Internet, and I include a simple one in my GET HIRED book as well, if you really can't make up your mind using one of the others.

# Preparing for the Interview

## Your Personal Pitch

This is a generic advice rather than something specifically applicable to Scrum Master roles - *you need to be able to very quickly tell the interviewer why you are an awesome candidate for the role*. This “Pitch” is similar to your Personal Profile that you’ve included in your Resume, but should be perhaps less formal and a bit more natural, delivered with relative ease and friendly confidence.

Some people refer to it as “Elevator Pitch”, but I’m not a huge fan of cheesy and overused industry terms, so let’s steer clear off it.

However you want to call it, this Pitch will be something you should be able to spit out if woken up in the middle of the night, and how you spin it - is entirely up to you. One thing is known for sure that the potential employer is less interested in where you were born, and more in what you’ve been doing recently that will directly translate into the job requirements they’ve advertised, bringing value to their company as soon as possible.

This Pitch will also be your default answer to the first Interview question most applicants hear - “*Tell us about yourself*”.

## Company Research

The right research plays an important - if not crucial - role in your potential success or failure as a job applicant.

Even in matters as seemingly straightforward as Agile Scrum Master, where the framework, as well as principles, roles, events, and responsibilities are clearly defined for you - *each Company applies its own spin on the role you’ll be expected to perform*.

Work environment and team culture will also be different, so the more knowledge of the Industry, the Company, what Product they are producing, their known competition on the market, potential methodologies they have adopted in the past you can show - the better off you will be.

To keep this TL;DR version of the book as short as I’ve promised in the Introduction, I’ll just quickly list the pieces of information that are not impossible to find online these days, and that would make you look like a much better informed and prepared job applicant during the Interview.

- What Services and Digital Products is the company producing?
- What is their high level organisational structure?
- What are their publicly announced goals and vision, or mission statement?
- What are their geographic locations? Do those work for you?
- What is company culture like - employment benefits, career advancement opportunities, etc?

The last point would be the hardest to fulfill, but if done right - via direct connections with people who have worked for the company, perhaps - it could be most valuable for you as a job candidate making a decision if they should go for it, or pursue another role.

Among research methods you could use basic Google search for “best” companies that practice Agile delivery of Digital and Software Products, browsing LinkedIn.com group discussions, running a few Agile Scrum Master search queries on your favourite job website, and seeing what results come up.

As I mentioned multiple times, connecting with real people - via Social Media, as most commonly accessible method - who could provide you with the insights both into the Industry and specific Company you’ve been researching - would be the best way to improve your recruitment chances as a fresh person in the professional Agile space.

## Interview Questions

After contacting recruiter and maybe having a quick screening chat with them, you will hopefully reach the point of speaking with the actual hiring manager of the company offering the job.

Practice shows that *majority of those* are still using standard set of Interview questions, not necessarily tailored for a Scrum Master or any other Agile Delivery role. Often there is a second interview that is more specialised or “technical”, and that is where you are being cross-checked by one of their current Scrum Masters or senior and trusted members of their Team.

I assume that I don’t need to state the obvious here, like that **you need to understand and know Scrum** process, roles, recommended Team composition, practices, artefacts, standard Events and responsibilities that classic Scrum Master role covers. This was never intended as another Scrum Guide - there are plenty of those available on the Internet and from Certifying authorities for free, and you should definitely study one back to front before going for any of Scrum Master roles.

With that sentiment out of the way, let’s skip the obvious Scrum and Agile-specific questions like “*How long should a daily stand-up go for?*”, and review the other common Interview questions, including behavioural ones:

1. **“Tell Me About Yourself...”** - that’s your Pitch that we’ve just discussed above. Try and fit it into one or two minutes, and focus on your recent work experience that is relevant to the job you are applying for.
2. **“Why do you want to work here?”** - your chance to show how much you know about the company, then spinning it back to how you personally are well suited for the organisation as a valuable asset. Remember that they are trying to fulfill their needs first, yours - maybe second...
3. **“What makes you better than others?”** aka **“Why should we hire you?”** - tell them why you think you are the best candidate for the role. You need to believe it yourself, if you want to sound convincing,

as people interviewing you are likely doing it for a living - they can tell the difference. Also, nobody likes arrogance, and yes - there is a big difference between confidence and arrogance.

4. **“Why are you leaving your current job?”** - I always advocate for candidates to be honest and upfront, but remember that you are still stuck in the recruitment game (*which is somewhat similar to dating*), so bringing up various issues and drama from the past is likely to push you backwards rather than spark something positive between you and recruiters. Think about it. Prepare a truthful, positive, not too heavy pitch here.
5. **“What do you like to do in your spare time?”** - I recommend against pretending that you work all the time, during business hours, and when you get home. Don't be afraid to show that you have a life outside of work - it's a good thing.
6. **“What is your biggest strength?”** - You should have practiced your personal Pitch many times by now, and this is another way to repeat it, perhaps linking it more closely with specifics of the job description or other information you've researched about the company and the project. E.g. if they are working on bringing some work off-shore, you'd benefit from mentioning that you work well with distributed teams, and have good knowledge of collaboration tools.
7. **“What is your biggest weakness?”** - Best mention a real one, but spin it in a way that it appears contained and like something you are working on improving, rather than an actual issue they should worry about. Don't use cheesy stuff like *“I work too much”* - or they might roll their eyes.
8. **“Have you ever been in a difficult situation at work and how you resolved it?”** - have a couple of those prepared before you step into the Interview, seriously, as this question rapidly becomes very popular among hiring managers. Present a real scenario, where you've responded to the situation, performed some clear actions to resolve it, and achieved a clear - preferably positive - resolution.
9. **“What qualities a good Scrum Master should possess?”** - open-ended question, but I suggest focusing on natural Leadership, and flexibility when it comes to dealing with all sorts of people.
10. **“Have you been in a stressful situation at work? How did you deal with it?”** - behavioural question where the hiring manager wants to see your level of stress-resilience. Be honest in your answer, but understand what they are ultimately looking for - a stress-resilient Scrum Master who is going to deal with different and unpredictable situations, rather than freaking out.
11. **“There was a fault in the Product Increment that your team just shipped...”** - demonstrate understanding of Scrum process and best Agile practices in handling defects, as well as being calm and collected around situations that are out of your control, where you need to be reactive, rather than stressed and trying to control something you cannot.
12. **“Your Product Owner just cancelled a Sprint. How will you handle it?”** - again, mixed demonstration of knowledge of Scrum principles, as well as calm and collected approach to breaking the “bad” news to the Team, accepting the losses and moving on.

13. **“What if your Product Backlog is not groomed, and Product Owner doesn’t know what to do?”** - show your ability to take ownership of the situation, where you would help Product Owner, coach and assist them bringing Backlog into shape.
14. **“Do you have any questions for us?”** - you’d better have some! You need to demonstrate being interested in the company and the job, as well as weaving in relevant information you’ve learned about the company during your research.

These are only some of the questions you could be asked at an interview, and it will greatly vary from both the interview stage - e.g. behavioural screening vs. Scrum process knowledge test - and the company itself.

As I mentioned above, you can certainly expect standard set of Scrum-related questions where they might ask you about recommended number of team members, team roles, if there is such thing as “Iteration Zero”, and those kinds of tricky things you’d learn from Scrum Guide and other sources.

## Conclusion

Agile Delivery and Project Management space is a busy and competitive job market for both the applicants and professional recruiters.

Ultimately being an effective Scrum Master means accepting certain view of Software and Digital Product delivery, which is different from traditional forms of direct control that Project Managers would be used to.

As long as you understand the value of transparency and flexibility, regular review and adaptation to changing conditions, you should be able to naturally develop a solid base to properly embrace responsibilities of a Scrum Master, later expanding into broader areas of Agile framework knowledge, and more complex concepts like scaling.

But those would be topics for another book perhaps.

Thank you very much for reading.

## P.S.

Please consider buying the larger and more all-rounded [advice book of mine from Amazon](#), and check out the [YouTube channel](#) for my free training videos that I aim to publish **at least 1 per fortnight** - covering the main topics of Professional Agile Job Search, Recruitment, and improving yourself as an active Scrum Master and job applicant.