

Agile Living By Jeanne Loehnis

If you are a computer programmer or web designer in today's world, you have heard the phrase "agile programming". Loosely defined, agile methodology is about approaching the project iteratively. When agile is practiced, programmers circle through the steps of discussion, definition, choosing a next deliverable, completing the task and rolling out a product. Then, they re-evaluate the whole project before choosing the task for the next iteration. This differs from older methods whereby the entire, massive project was outlined, documented, planned, started, and often failed or succeeded long after the deadline years later.

So what does agile have to do with natural, healthy living? What life lesson is there in "agile"? It seems that the American way of life is changing rapidly. Fifty years ago, education was about planning for a career which often lasted until age 65 when we could retire. Today, it is very likely that the job we were doing just 10 years ago is no longer needed, at least not in the same way that we were trained to do it. As for retiring at 65, that is likely not feasible from a financial perspective. And "sit around and rest retirement" is not even healthy! The active senior is happier, healthier, joyously contributing to society, and likely, "agile".

Let's imagine for a moment, the alternative to agile. For many, living to a ripe old age can mean celebrating an 80th birthday. Eighty years on this planet! Let's pick any eight decades from the last century and, for example, contemplate being born in 1930 at the end of the Great Depression. Spend the next 20 years in your parents' home, learning the ways of the world from the eyes of their upbringing: 1910-1930. Did you learn to drive an automobile? Probably. Did you own a TV? Maybe. Did you own a computer, an iPod, a CD player? A what???

I don't think so! Can you imagine life in the year 2010 without agility, assuming that you'd learned all there was to learn about life by 1950, and going about your business?

It wouldn't be easy. Life itself is in a constant state of flux. Just like nature and the physical aspects of life which are ever changing and evolving, so too is the collective knowledgebase ever growing, ever offering new ideas, new opportunities, new solutions to old problems. Any attempt to freeze frame and focus on perfecting a look, a skill, a methodology, is likely to be outdated before it is finished.

How do we do "agile"? How do we overcome fear of change and the overwhelm that accompanies "so many choices"? Are there basic life skills and personality traits which make agile living possible?

Looking to the recovering community, we find the concept of embracing change in *The Serenity Prayer* originally penned by Reinhold Niebuhr (*):

God grant me
the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can, and
wisdom to know the difference.

Accept, apply non-resistance, wherever possible. Fighting usually doesn't work. Be courageous and change those habits and beliefs which are blocking agility. Apply wisdom when making decisions.

Back to the world of the computer and putting "agile" into practice with "eXtreme programming" (XP). From Wikipedia (**), the free, on-line encyclopedia, one of few core principles in XP is **embracing change**. Embracing change is about an attitude of acceptance, of working **with** the flow of life rather than **against** it. By embracing change as a necessary and wonderful part of life, we free ourselves from the roadblocks of frustration, anger, and fear.

The five key values in XP, communication, simplicity, feedback, courage, and respect, can be applied to successful, happy, and agile living. Communicate with others. Talk about your needs, wants, goals and dreams. Respect others and listen carefully for their feedback. Ideas that may not have occurred to you are obvious to them. Live simply. Avoid the trappings of modern day life that tie you down through maintenance or rigid schedules.

Finally, as in *The Serenity Prayer*, be courageous. Be bold. Try it! Change it! What have you got to lose? If it doesn't work, use your inner wisdom to realize that fact, accept it, and courageously change – again!

Agile living suggests a lighter, freer, easier attitude toward life. Try it. See for yourself if agile is more rewarding than today's heavy load.

(*) *There is much written about the Serenity Prayer that is easily searchable on the WWW. Try <http://www.allaboutprayer.org/serenity-prayer.htm> and http://skdesigns.com/internet/articles/prose/niebuhr/serenity_prayer/ to get started.*

(**) *From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extreme_Programming#XP_values*

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