What is a Scrum Product Owner?

You are a visionary, representative, editor, and investment manager.

As the team's visionary, you are the person who knows more than anyone else what this product can and will be. Just as Michelangelo could see the statue in the stone, you can see your end product in the needs of your users. You know who will use this product, who will buy it, and why.

Like a congressperson, you must deliver value to those you represent. You'll need to listen to everybody's point of view, lobby behind the scenes, and practice diplomacy. You act as a buffer between the stakeholders and the scrum team, dampening the political noise so the team can concentrate on delivering.

Like a newspaper editor, you plan a slate of stories for every cycle. You work with your team to clarify the value and intent of each user story, and you accept or reject these stories when your team thinks they are done. Just as no news story makes it into the paper until the editor says it's ready, no user story makes it into your product until you say it's ready.

Last, but not least, you are also an investment manager. Running a development team costs real people real money, and plenty of it. The people who fund the team's efforts view the money they are putting in as an investment. The product owner's job is to maximize the return that the company gets on its investment in the team. The product owner does this by feeding the team only the most valuable work and making sure that the team understands the requirements well enough to deliver the goods.

You, the product owner, understand your team's project top to bottom. You synthesize your stakeholders' requirements into a rational, ordered product backlog that your scrum team can understand and implement.

The team appreciates you because you ensure that the work they do is meaningful. While you may not know a great deal about what goes on under the hood, you can talk intelligently to technical people, and they have learned to trust you.

The customers trust you as well, because you and your team have a track record of delivering things they value—and because you can make sense of those technical people and their strange ways.

The business appreciates you because, every day, you are maximizing the return they get on the investment they are making in your team.

AGILE LEARNING LABS