INTRODUCTION

Highland Solutions is a Chicago-based enterprise technology and business solutions consulting firm founded by Brian Sutherland in 1998. Highland's approach was to work closely with clients to understand their business processes, then build technology solutions to streamline those business processes. The organization prided itself on its technical prowess.

Prior to their adoption of Agile in 2012, the company had achieved modest growth and had 25 employees. The company had an informal, family feel. There were frequent all hands lunches, and "beer thirty" was celebrated on Friday afternoons.

THE CHALLENGE

There were multiple challenges being faced by the organization in 2012.

- First, the organization was technically savvy, but lacked consistent processes for developing and delivering client solutions.
- There was also a growing disconnect between the leadership team and the millennials who made up the workforce.
- Leadership was concerned about not upsetting the young and highly mobile workforce.
- Finally, as a small and privately held firm, there was little sharing of financial or performance information outside the leadership team.

The primary motivation for adopting Agile arose when Highland's team began to grow. Former methods of organization and communication stopped working when the number of client projects and developers began to increase at the same time. Highland was looking for a way to organize that would help balance its desires for sustainable development and dependable, successful product delivery. Agile quickly became the leading contender in Highland's search for a methodology because it held out the promise of fulfilling both of those desires.

100% Increase in Sales

Increased Profits by **300%**

Staff Growth by **100%**

INDUSTRY
IT Solutions

PROFILE
Highland Solutions is a global provider of collaborative, enterprise solutions.
Service offerings include custom development, cloud computing, systems integration, mobile applications, ecommerce, social business platforms and customer relationship management (CRM). Through strategic partnerships, Highland continues to lead and evolve the rapidly changing technology landscape. Their solutions are transactional, connected, compliant and mobile.

FOUNDED
1998

WEBSITE
http://www.highlandsolutions.com/

SOLUTION

In 2012, the company made the decision to get training and coaching on how to use agile software development. In September of 2012, Highland hired an Agile trainer who put the entire organization through two days of Agile and Scrum training. Highland knew from the beginning that the commitment to Agile practices would demand a lot of everyone involved, but they committed to follow through and gave itself to the rigorous "inspect and adapt" cycles of Scrum. At the time, no one could have known how radically that whole-hearted commitment to incremental improvement would impact everything Highland did for the better.

At the start, Highland had three main agile development teams and each team was supported by an internal client engagement manager who acted as a product owner.

The company followed up that investment with coaching starting in October 2012. The coaching focused initially on how to effectively use Scrum and to self-organize. Lacking a dedicated Scrum Master, an outside coach filled this role until a scrum master could be hired. A couple of months later, we hired a full-time Scrum Master to serve the three teams and Highland made the important decision to retain our Agile coach to mentor and develop the new Scrum Master until he was ready to continue the demanding practices of Scrum on his own.

Another change that occurred at the same time was the hiring of a COO whose leadership skills complimented that of the owner's.

RESULTS

The company performance since 2012 has been nothing short of remarkable.

- In 2015, Highland was named to the list of Inc. 5000 Fastest Growing Companies
- The company has grown from 25 employees in 2012 to nearly 50 in 2015.

"Anthony made a huge impact in a short amount of time with detailed feedback, examples, and reinforcement."

BAILEY HATCH
Product Owner at
Highland Solutions

HIGHLAND SOLUTIONS
Clients Include:

- Sales have doubled
- Profitability has increased three-fold

Agile directly helped with:

- Increasing the accuracy of delivery dates by using each team's velocity and the client's project backlog.
- Improving overall organization capacity and resource planning.

Just as importantly, the organization's culture has change for the better.

- Transparency – The company maintains an open book and shares financial performance openly with all team members. Client satisfaction and team performance is discussed openly.
- Purpose – The company shares the business strategy throughout the year via updates every 6-8 weeks in all hands meetings.
- Engagement – Team member engagement is measured each year by an outside firm. The results, both positive and negative, are shared openly.
- Empowerment – Each agile team is self-organizing and responsible for how the work gets done. The teams pull work from backlogs maintained by the product owners.
- Shift from Technology focus to Client Satisfaction – The introduction of Agile helped get teams focused on what will make the clients most satisfied.

It's not been exactly smooth sailing.

- In 2014, some clients chose to leave Highland. That has led to some frank discussions about the client engagements with a view toward what could be learned.
- There has also been some change in the staff. Some long time Highland team members didn't mesh well with the shift to agile and chose to leave. Others have been hired to keep up with the growing customer demand.

> *"Anthony is a highly-organized, high-touch coach and project leader. His expertise in agile and project leadership and his insightful work with our agile teams has made a significant impact."*
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> JON BERBAUM
> Vice President,
> Client Services Delivery at
> Highland Solutions