Scrum Master is now Product Owner

My goal is to share interesting concepts, situations and ideas in Agile and Scrum adoption, through my Blog.

So here is one – I recently met someone whose first statement to me as he approached me was, "I have a problem." This immediately got my attention, "How can I help? What is your problem?"

He said, "I used to be a Scrum Master. My team liked me and I enjoyed it as well. However, our Product Owner decided to move on, and since I was coaching the product owner, I had a fair idea about what she was doing. So I was the chosen 'one'. I am now a Product Owner and very comfortable in the role. I also helped hire a new Scrum Master and he is coming up to speed."

"So…, what is the problem?" I thought in my head and all the permutations started coming up, "He does not like the Scrum Master. Scrum Master used to be a project manager. He does not like being a Product Owner. He is facing challenges being as good a product owner as the Scrum Master he used to be….."

I said out loud, "And your problem is…?" He finished my sentence, "I think the new Scrum Master needs coaching. He comes with past Scrum experience, but every team is different, and every Scrum Master is different. He needs to understand that and adapt his style."

"You should coach the new Scrum Master in that case." I chimed in.

"I would. But I am Product Owner – it is not in my role to be a Scrum expert. If I were to give any Scrum advice to the Scrum Master, he would not like it. As it is my hands are full with my responsibilities as well as in covering up the mistakes new Scrum Master is makes."

"Have you tried giving advice?"

"Of course, I have and I was asked to back-off."

"That is an interesting problem. My recommendation will be to write your thoughts down in an organized way and have a one-on-one with the new Scrum Master. Share your experiences as Scrum Master with him and ask him what his experiences are. If you provide information as sharing rather than as advice, your Scrum Master will be more receptive. Secondly, if the team also shares your concerns, you can bring it up during Sprint retrospective."

He took both the suggestions to his team. Later he emailed that both the recommendations worked, but slowly. However the Scrum Team was getting in a better place.

This got me thinking on the underlying problem in the scenario – What if a Development Team member(s) or Product Owner are more knowledgeable in Scrum than the Scrum Master? In other words, what if the Scrum team has high Scrum maturity, but Scrum Master has low Scrum expertise or is new? This is a real life problem that many teams face. Scrum Master would feel the responsibility of being a Scrum coach, which will hinder team's ability to help a new Scrum Master catch-up with the team.

Here are a few things that can be done:
1. Set Scrum Master's expectation about team's Scrum maturity upfront. A person with servant-leadership characteristic will be open to learning from the team
2. Provide tips and inputs as part of sharing team's history and sharing information, rather than advising. This takes away the stress in the situation
3. Help the Scrum Master through Sprint Retrospective meeting, one step at a time
4. Create a buddy program for new and aspiring Scrum Masters in the organization, through Scrum Community.
5. Have existing Scrum Masters coach new Scrum Masters before moving on to a different role
6. Spend time coaching new Scrum Master, rather than spending that same time in covering up the mistakes

Any other thoughts on what can be done?