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Agile Coaching

Agile
Coaching

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around the team board. The team needs enough room to stand in a semi-circle so that they can see each other and the board. Encourage them to move the furniture to make a good space for the daily standup. If there's just not enough room in their workspace, look for space nearby. Where meeting rooms are scarce, be creative—we've worked with teams who used a spacious stair landing for their daily standup.

If the team has to run the daily standup away from their team workspace, it's more disruptive because of the shuffle time to get there and get back. It can also be a problem because they need to talk about tasks on their team board. Some teams solve this by taking over a meeting room and maintaining their team board and charts on the walls of this "scrum room." We're not fans of this approach because they can't see the tasks during the rest of the day—their team board ceases to be an *Information Radiator*. They'll be better off creating a portable team board, that can be taken along to the daily standup, then brought back to the team space. We'll talk more about how you can help them do this in Chapter 8, *Keeping it Visible*, on page 119.

5.2 For the Team by the Team

It's essential to get the message across to the team that their daily standup is for *them* to synchronize *their* work. It is *not* held for a project manager or team lead to gather progress from the team or give feedback on their work. Encourage the team to direct their answers towards other team members.

Keep conversation focused on the work in the plan; if someone is just back from vacation this is not the time to discuss their trip. The team doesn't need to mention work done on other projects unless it is seriously hampering their ability to complete their work. Be polite, but if this happens, remind the team of the purpose of the daily standup and get it moving again.

When the daily standup is new to the team, you can nudge the conversation along. If a person hesitates, prompt them with one of the three questions. When people have been working in a pair, it's fine for only one of the pair to summarize what they did. Once the team gets used to the daily standup, you'll find they naturally move away from the three question format and include additional

Nudge conversation along.

questions. The team can add reminders about these new questions to their *Team Board.*

Standup Chekov

WHAT WE DID YESTERDAY

ANY NEW CARDS?

SALES MEETINGS?

WHO IS EXPOSED TODAY?

MARK TIME SPENT

PICK CARDS AND PARTNERS

Standup Chekov
by Rachel

I worked in an XP team where we posted a check list on our team board to remind us what to cover at our daily standup. We called this list the "Standup Chekov" and we posted a sign on our team board with a picture of Pavel Chekhov, a character from the original "Star Trek" TV series to remind us to check-off our Chekov questions.

You'll notice we moved on from the three question format. We had some other items we wanted to cover, mostly related to customer support. For instance, every day we took turns to make sure that some developers were designated "Exposed" which meant interruptible for Sales and Customer support issues. At the time, we were experimenting with tracking time spent per story so we could improve our estimates. But the most crucial question that we used this meeting for, was who would be pair programming together.

Our team later added some other Chekovs to remind them about other things, such getting a story done.

Establishing a Team Focus

Watch out—if you're always asking the questions in the daily standup, you may find team members direct their replies to you, as if the meeting is for your benefit not theirs. Try to deflect this by not meeting their gaze and looking around the circle at the team.

If you notice that team members continue to treat the meeting as a report to you, come right out and say "Please can you direct your replies to the whole team? The daily standup is for you all, to work out what you need to do today, not me." You can also try not attending the daily standup at all, leaving the team to run it without you.

Avoid giving praise, saying "Great!" or even "Thank you" after someone lets the team know what they completed. This reinforces the impression that the daily standup is about pleasing you rather than synchronizing the team's activities. When you give a single word of praise, it can leave the recipient puzzled. Did you mean that they did a good job? What aspect of their work was great? You'll also leave the team wondering why some people get praise while others don't.

Team Controls the Flow

Encourage the team to take control of their daily standup. To make this explicit, introduce a speaking token that is passed from one person to the next. The token can be any object (such as a ball or marker pen), which each speaker holds when they have something to say. Each team member takes the token when they are speaking and decides who to pass it onto next. There's no single point of control. This helps keep the meeting flowing, the person who holds the token becomes more aware of the rest of the team waiting.

If someone can't attend the daily standup and is phoning into the meeting, a walkabout phone handset works well as the speaking token. It enables the person at the other end to hear, while keeping everyone focussed on talking to the team rather than talking to the phone. The team might decide to stop using a speaking token later on, when they're used to how the daily standup flows.

Here's a sample of a typical round of conversation that you might hear at a daily standup.

Tuesday Morning

Damian starts the daily standup "OK, I'll get the ball rolling. Yesterday, I worked on processing the new data feed. I checked it in but I noticed it

seems to stall part way through—it's not bringing in all of the book blurbs. So today I'll be trying to work out what's happening with that before I pick up another task. No other blockers for me. Catch!" he says tossing Larry the tennis ball that the team uses as a speaking token.

Larry who's looking rather sleepy today jumps with surprise and just manages to catch the ball "Well, I've been working on setting up test data. I've created some XML files by sampling the data feed and I checked them into SVN last night. Today, I want to start testing the book carousel, if it's ready?" he says holding the ball out to to Rebecca.

Rebecca takes the token "Well" hesitates Rebecca "it's not quite finished but it would be good if you could take a quick look at what I've got so far."

"Okay" Larry adds "let's do that this morning. While you're getting ready, I'll make a start on the test scripts for the Recommendations Engine."

Rebecca continues with her update "So yesterday. . . I worked on the carousel. It's going pretty well but I haven't done any browser testing yet, so I expect Larry's going to find some problems. I'll probably be working on that for most of the day. Nothing's in my way. Joe?" asks Rebecca holding out the token.

Joe takes the token "I got in early today and finished off ISBN search this morning so that's ready for testing too. I won't be starting any new tasks just yet because Amanda's asked me to go to a teleconference with the Singapore team this morning."

"So no issues you need me to follow up with Ops today?" asks Raj.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Raj!" grins Joe and the team breaks up to get started with their tasks.

Notice the team in the story talks about the progress on the tasks rather than giving exhaustive accounts of what they did yesterday. Also, they're not diving in trying to solve every problem that comes up. If Joe has some ideas about solving the problem that Damian's run into, they can chat about that after the meeting.

Only the people who actually worked on the tasks on the team board answered the questions. Raj is the project manager, he's there to follow up any issues that come up rather than work on the tasks in the plan. Amanda is the product manager and acts as Customer for the team, she wasn't able to attend the daily standup so she'll have to catch up with progress later in the day by asking someone who was there.

Who Takes Part

The whole team comes to daily standup: developers, testers, designers, customers, agile coach, etc. We have seen agile teams tell customers (and other stakeholders) that they must stay silent because they are "chickens." Discourage this; it's disrespectful and can cause unnecessary upset. The team needs to build bridges with their stakeholders not burn them.

The focus of the daily standup is the work in the current plan, the customer plays a part in this so she can let the team know what she's working on in the same way as anyone else on the team. The daily standup may also be the ideal time to pass information on to the team about upcoming work; such updates can be covered at the end of the meeting.

Watch out for conversations at daily standups that can't be followed by the whole team. If you close down a discussion during the daily standup because it's not relevant to everyone, remind them to get it going again straight after the daily standup with a smaller group.

Two-part Daily Standup
by Rachel

I worked with one team that decided they would have a two-part daily standup. The first part was a catch-up for the development team about who worked on what and any issues. This was pretty dull for the customer team to listen to, as the conversation was full of references to technical jargon. We didn't exclude the customer team, they could see when the meeting started because we were standing up, and were welcome to join us. In the second part, the development team would call the customer team over to let them know who would be working on the user stories, and arrange any follow-up meetings to discuss details of the story tests.

This solution worked pretty well for the team. Now the team could have all the conversations they needed to start the day without wasting their customer's time.

5.3   Handling Issues

When someone on the team mentions an issue that's getting in their way, it's often best to leave the discussion of how to solve it until the end of the daily standup. The team won't have the full picture until everyone has spoken, and each issue may not require the whole team to solve it. Try to separate conversations out in the daily standup—

Liz Says...

Forget the Formula

The Scrum method presents strict rules about who speaks, and what should be said at the daily standup. It places great emphasis on starting on-time.

Rules for running daily standup meetings are to help teams get started with them. There's no magic in this formula. These rules should not be a straight-jacket imposed on the team forever more. Sticking strictly to this formula makes the daily standup feel like it's "being done by numbers," which stifles self-organization within the team.

My advice is don't let these meetings lose sight of their purpose. I am happier to hear animated discussions and see everyone engaged than see the Scrum formula being executed like clockwork.

invite the team to share progress before discussing how to resolve any issues. Quick clarifying questions are OK but encourage the team to move on once they understand the problem.

There's no point asking about what got in the way, if issues aren't followed up. Avoid saying "Let's take that off-line" every time the conversation meanders or someone raises an issue because this is ambiguous. Rather than scribbling notes about issues in your notebook, write each item that requires follow-up on a whiteboard that everyone can see, to create a *Parking Lot* for issues. At the end of the meeting, revisit the parking lot to prioritize the items and work out who needs to be involved in any follow-up. Any issues addressed in the daily standup can be wiped off, if they've been resolved. There's no need to log them, although if they are getting a lot of interruptions from outside, the team may decide to track time wasted on handling them.

The daily standup should not be a substitute for other meetings. If it throws up the need for a longer discussion with the whole team, suggest the team arranges a meeting to cover it rather than tacking on a conversation to the end of their daily standup.

As well as the issues mentioned by the team, you can check if they have any dependencies on items being delivered by people outside the team. Some typical examples are software interfaces, editorial copy, design assets, database changes, etc. The team will probably evolve the layout of their team board over time so that it incorporates reminders to follow such things up.

5.4   Setting the Time

Most teams prefer to have the daily standup at the start of the working day, to discuss who's working on what before getting immersed in their work. However, in many companies, people don't arrive into work at the same time, so they need to find a time for the meeting that works for everyone.

As a coach, you shouldn't pick the meeting time. Instead, ask the team when they want the daily standup. This won't make the decision any easier, but it builds team commitment to the time and promotes a culture of the team solving their own problems.

Make it a team decision.

Sometimes getting the whole team to the standup every day is a challenge. For example, some people may work from home, be in other meetings, or not work full-time on the project. Daily standups are even more of a challenge when the team is distributed between different offices and time zones. Remember what you're trying to achieve—good communication and everyone knowing what they need to work on. Encourage the team to experiment with different approaches until they find a good compromise.

Tele-conference calls or alternating the time of the daily standup may work. Some people may need to be excused from the meeting and kept up to date in a different way. Perhaps co-located team members can have a face-to-face daily standup followed by a conference call with remote team members. For different time-zones, that conversation might even be at the other end of the day.

> **Night People vs Morning People**
> *by Rachel*
>
> One company that I worked with offered very flexible working hours as a perk for all employees. Some team members didn't arrive in the office until after lunch and then worked late into the evening, while others came

in early and finished work in the afternoon. This team chose an afternoon time for their daily standup, which helped them synchronize their work.

The downside was that the morning people had to start work without knowing where the rest of the team had got up to until the daily standup meeting after lunch. Teams split over time-zones have the same issue and often run a morning and afternoon standup meeting. I suggested to the team that they try this. Now the morning people could sync up with each other before the night people came in.

5.5   When To Coach

If you're not directing the conversation and keeping the daily standup running to time, then where do you add value as a coach? Our view is that a coach acts as the conscience of the team—a bit like like Jiminy Cricket in the children's film Pinocchio. For instance, you can gently remind the team about what they planned to do if they're straying from it. There's a real art to this; you don't want to come across as nagging so try not to do this pre-emptively—you don't want to be the person always saying don't forget this or that. Wait until they're actually drifting, then make an observation that what you see them doing is different than what they planned. Ask them whether it's really a problem, and if so how they're planning to handle it.

The members of the team spend their days focused on implementing user stories, and they often don't notice how quickly time is passing. You can help by reminding the team about how many days before the next demo or release, and to check that the team board reflects what they're working on now.

It's not just the passing of time that you may need to remind the team about. They're following an iterative cycle. They need to take time, during each iteration, to work with their customer to get user stories ready for the next planning session. They also need to follow up actions from their retrospective and get these done by the end of the iteration.

Sometimes, the team doesn't raise problems because they have gotten used to them, or think they are unsolvable. As a coach, keep an inquiring mind, and be on the look out for opportunities for improvement. The daily standup often reveals areas where team members need coaching support. Read the team by listening to what is and isn't being said and noticing any odd body language:

- Is everyone engaged, motivated, and excited?

- Are they making progress and working on high priority tasks?

- Are they working together and helping each other?

- Are they able to concentrate and do their job without interruptions?

Unless you are seriously concerned that the team has lost focus on the current plan, follow up on these observations after the meeting or defer discussion until the next retrospective.

5.6   Hurdles

People Arriving Late for the Meeting

Don't repeat information as latecomers arrive. This is disrespectful to everyone else, and sends the message that it is OK to be late.

We've worked with teams who ask latecomers to pay a fine, if they miss the start of the daily standup. This might work for the team but be aware that some people may be happy to pay (and even feel good about being late if the pot of money is to be given to charity or a contribution to a team night out).

If a team member is consistently late then talk to him about it. Try to understand what the problem is. Maybe his alarm clock is broken or he's lost his interest in the work (see suggestions for unblocking motivation in Section 4.4, *Energizing the Team*, on page 68). Whatever the cause, something needs to change for him to participate in team meetings.

Help him become aware of his behavior, as this can be enough to trigger a change. Does he realize that arriving late is bothering his team mates? Explain the impact of his late arrival on others.

> **Big Visible Chart**
> *by Rachel*
>
> I worked with a team where a senior developer, Vicky, was often late for the daily standup meeting. Vicky didn't realize how often she was coming in late—in her mind she was only late once or twice a month. Her behavior was starting to have a knock on effect on the junior developers; if it was OK for Vicky to be late then they could be too.
>
> The team discussed this at their retrospective and proposed keeping a sign-up chart on their team board; every time a person was late for the daily standup they would add their name to this list. Vicky didn't feel

uncomfortable about this because she still didn't believe she was late that often. The chart provided a feedback mechanism for the team that helped them become aware of how often they were actually arriving late. After Vicky had put her name up a couple of times, she started to make extra efforts to arrive on time. The other team members followed suit, and by the second week everyone was in the office in plenty of time for daily standup.

So the chart designed to measure the problem, actually helped to reduce the problem. This is an example of how a team decision to track information visibly influences behavior.

Meeting Takes Too Long

If the daily standup regularly takes more than fifteen minutes, look for ways to speed it up. In this case, we do recommend sticking to the formula questions, with each team member giving their replies in turn and leaving discussions until the end.

Remind the team there's no need for them to list every single thing they did yesterday, only cover what's relevant for their team mates to get the big picture. Focus on what's relevant to the tasks being worked on today and what needs to happen to deliver the stories by due date.

If you are working with a large team (more than 10 members), you can speed up the daily standup by asking for an update on each user story rather than from each person. Although, this may make the daily standup more bearable, it does not solve the underlying problem that it's difficult to create a sense of shared ownership with a large team.

In a daily standup meeting of this size, you'll probably notice that some team members aren't listening to other team members. The amount of work in progress has become too much for them to keep up with all the details. Some stories don't seem relevant to them. When people start caring only about their own tasks, teamwork starts to breaks down.

A better solution for large teams is to break into sub-teams, who plan their work separately and have smaller daily standups. Then the sub-teams co-ordinate their work via a new meeting called *Scrum of Scrums*.

Daily Standup Is Hijacked

The daily standup can also be taken over by someone who has noticed that this is a good time to nab the team for other discussions. This person is not necessarily disrupting the daily standup on purpose, this usually happens because they don't understand how the Agile life-cycle

works. Handle this by talking to the hijacker afterwards rather than challenging them in the meeting.

Sometimes this person is from outside the team and comes to the daily standup because he wants the team to help him out with a piece of work, such as a support request or creating a demo for a sales meeting. Explain they're welcome to come along to the daily standup but it's focus has to be on the stories in the current plan. Recommend they talk with the customer about their requests so these can be considered in the next planning meeting.

Another hijacker can be a manager or team lead.

Daily Standup Takeover

Ray was introducing Agile to his team. He set up a team room where the team held the daily standup meeting and kept their iteration plan on the wall. Every morning he led the way to the team room and pulled up a bean bag waiting for the rest of the team to join him. As they trooped in, they also pulled up bean bags, and slumped down ready for Ray to start proceedings.

Ray ran the daily standup in two halves. The first half gave him a chance to gather team progress, the second half was dedicated to working through the issues and allocating work for the day. The daily standup usually took half an hour but this was really a series of conversations between Ray and individual team members.

It wasn't a good use of their time and it definitely wasn't encouraging the team to take ownership and self-organize. From their perspective, Ray could have achieved the same effect by going around to the individual team members while they were sitting at their desks. At least that way, they could get on with some work while he was talking to someone else.

I talked with Ray about the purpose of the daily standup but he didn't seem to think that the way he ran it was a problem. So I tried another angle, I asked him to come along to observe another team run their daily standup; this opened his eyes to the possibility that he could encourage his own team to report to each other and decide their own tasks.

You might be surprised but it can be even worse than in the story above. Another sit-down daily standup was run by a program manager passing around a spreadsheet to her team. The team filled the spreadsheet in without talking at all.

Don't criticize a person who doesn't know how to run the daily standup. You'll find that the remedy lies in education about how Agile works.

Can you arrange for the person running the daily standup to get some Agile training. Try taking them along to see how another team in your organization runs their daily standup? You could also suggest that you run the next daily standup to give them an example of how to do it. When they try applying what they learned, be an observer and then follow up by giving them feedback after the daily standup.

The Team isn't Working on the Planned Tasks

Often the tasks for a user story change when the team starts working on them, because they've learned more about what actually needs to be done. Encourage the team to add cards to represent new tasks on the team board so it's clear what the current plan is. Also remind them to remove any tasks that they're not planning to do any more. Now it's easier to match up what is said in the daily standup with the tasks on the team board.

Notice if members of the team are working on another project instead of the stories in this project; this may lead to them not delivering the stories in the current plan. If there's a risk of this then encourage the team to flag it up to their customer.

Unplanned work often also comes up when the team is supporting a live product, as well as developing new features for that product. This situation is very common for agile teams who deploy software early on in the project. We recommend working with the customer to establish a budget for support (in developer days), and tracking how much time is being spent on support against that. Try using different colored cards, on the team board, for support tasks so that it's very visible if they're being prioritized over new product development.

Daily Standup Isn't Wanted

Daily standups can seem scary because everyone is exposed. When the team is not getting tasks done, it becomes visible at the standup. If a person on the team objects to taking part in daily standups, check how much progress they're making on their tasks, just in case they're stuck and trying to hide out.

However, if the whole team objects to the daily standups, you have a more serious problem on your hands. It is possible that they're struggling to work as a team, or that the meetings are being badly run. We suggest you discuss their concerns in the retrospective.

Not Everyone Can Stand

You may have a member of the team who has health reasons for not standing during a daily standup, such as when someone is heavily pregnant or has a bad back. Look for a way to accommodate their needs in a way that helps them feel integrated in the team. If the rest of the team is standing, then make sure that this person is part of the team circle *without* people standing in front or behind them. You don't want this person to end up in the center of the circle or outside it. Consider running the daily standup as a sit-down meeting so everyone is on the same level but be aware that if you sit down it's likely to take longer.

5.7   Checklist

- Find a space that the team can run their daily standup around their team board. If they don't have room in their workspace then use a portable team board.

- Make the time that the daily standup runs a team decision. You can run it more than once a day, if not every one works the same hours.

- Encourage the team to keep their replies short and sweet. The three question formula can help the team get started but don't let this become a straight-jacket for daily standup conversation.

- Keep the daily standup flowing, a speaking token puts this in control of the team.

- Ask the customer along to the daily standup to give her progress and updates.

- Gather issues that come up on a whiteboard where everyone can see them. Prioritize it with the team and follow up afterwards.

- Review the effectiveness of the daily standup in the retrospective and experiment with the format.

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