

Awesome Status Meetings

Introduction

Following the simple step-by-step instructions, you may incrementally add elements of ceremony into an existing status meeting to make it AWESOME, more productive, faster, and more fun. Every business we encounter has some form of this style of weekly status meetings, so it is an easy low-risk place to start using ceremony.

What is the goal of your existing status meeting?

Hopefully, someone called it because there was something important and valuable to discuss and share. Many managers tell us “We hold a weekly status meeting to help the team members share what they are working on, synchronize better, and to eliminate surprises.” This is a great response.

To see how the team feels, to see if the meeting is valuable to them, I simply observe if the status meeting occurs when the manager who required it is away. Nine times out of ten not only does the team skip the meeting if the manager doesn't show, they actually flee the meeting room like school kids on a snow day. In those cases, the manager eventually admits they have the meeting really just so they know what is going on and to “keep everyone on their toes.” The meeting really wasn't *for the team*.

We propose you build a good status ceremony that actually accomplishes both goals: it keeps the manager informed and helps the group share what they are working on, synchronize better, and eliminate surprises. Of course, to meet our definition of ceremony, we also want it to deliver positive emotional energy. In our experience, some of the biggest energy drainers are:

- The meeting taking too much time
- The manager criticizes or assigns blame
- Too much talk about issues that do not impact the entire group
- People who monopolize the conversation

When we improve status meeting with ceremony, we look for specific ceremonial practices to minimize these problems.

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Ceremony Template

As you implement the steps to transform a status meeting through ceremony, fill out the following ceremonial description form with the team.

Name What we call the ceremony	
Purpose A clear goal or outcome	
Preparation Work done before the ceremony	
Participants Who is involved and what is their role	
Pattern (structure) The formal interactions between roles	

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Step-By-Step

The following simple steps will transform most status meetings. The steps *must* be applied incrementally, one at a time. Abrupt changes usually don't work. Large big bang changes coming from the boss usually don't work.

Instead, explore the power of ceremony through a series of small changes.

This is a low-risk minimum-impact approach—low risk to the manager, and minimum-impact to the team. Everybody can be comfortable with each tiny change before moving on. Each incremental step provides enough benefits to stand on its own.

Step 1: *Commit to not criticizing, blaming, or berating during the ceremony*

Status meetings can be used for many purposes. We propose that a status meeting is where team members can freely report critical information publicly and openly. This can only work if the manager commits to not using the information to criticize, blame, or berate. So the manager and team must commit to this as the very first step.

Step 2: *Provide a specific reporting structure*

Ask the participants to report their status using a ritualized formalized structure. This one step implemented all by itself is a significant win for most status meetings.

A common structure we use for a team delivering work is:

1. What I did since the last meeting is . . .
2. What I am doing today is . . .
3. Everyone should know . . .(concerns, announcements, observations, obstacles)

A common structure we use for a group of managers is:

1. My key metric is...
2. I have the following observation... (concern)

Repeat steps 1 thru 2 for all key metrics for that manager. Keep it short.
Repeat for all managers.

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Ceremony description assignment: In the ceremony description form, record the structure.

Step 3: *Use a talking stick*

The talking stick is a technique borrowed from our tribal heritage. A special item like a carved or decorated stick is selected to play a special role in the ceremony. Only the person holding the talking stick is allowed to talk.

Nobody interrupts the person holding the talking stick. And for people with authority, that goes double. We suggest a fine-jar, wherein interruptions are \$1/interruption. When you have enough money in the jar throw a pizza party for the team.

The stick is passed from person to person one at a time so everyone is given the opportunity to speak once.

The talking stick allows a participant to complete their status report without being interrupted. It encourages participants to focus and listen to the person with the talking stick.

Any item can serve as a talking stick. We have seen balls, toys, and even hats used. For ceremonial purposes. it is better to use the same object over time; an object which has special meaning to the team or somehow symbolizes the team.

Ceremony description assignment: In the ceremony description, update the structure description to include the talking stick.

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Step 4: *Shorten and time-box the meeting*

Tell the participants you want to review all of the status reports in twenty minutes or less. Practice moving quickly and efficiently through each report. Everyone only speaks once. Everyone listens intently. Encourage reporting concerns during the status meeting but discourage problem solving. The goal is to get everyone to report their status and concerns quickly so we all know them.

As people identify concerns, write them down. This is a *scribe* role now added to the ceremony. Record the concern but **do not try to solve them** during the status meeting or the meeting will drag on and on.

Once everyone is reporting their status in twenty minutes, shorten it to fifteen minutes; be happy if you finish in ten.

Ceremony description assignment: In the ceremony description, update the structure description to include the time-box and update the participants description to include the various roles (e.g. scribe, status reporter, etc.).

Step 5: *No manager questions*

We've also called this step *no interrogation*.

If the manager is still using the status meeting to ask specific questions of each participant, then it is time to stop. No manager questions.

The manager should not be constantly asking for the talking stick in order to ask questions. Listen to the status reports, record your questions or concerns, and move on. The goal is for everyone to quickly report once, not to answer questions.

The manager *can become the scribe* and record concerns stated by the participants and talk with them after the status ceremony. The

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talk should be how the manager can help to address the concern. If the concern is big enough, a new ceremony may need to be scheduled simply to address the concern.

A good technique some teams use is for the concerns to be publicly posted—radiated. Have the scribe post the concerns openly in the work area where everyone can see them. This reminds everyone that the concern has been stated and needs to be addressed. Then concern can be removed when it is resolved or mitigated.

Step 6: *Stand in a circle during the meeting*

Have the participants stand in a circle during the meeting. Skip sitting in a conference room around a table and getting comfortable. Focus the ceremony on the team reporting their status to each other, not to the manager. Encourage them to not look at the manager when reporting their status but instead to look around the circle.

If you are working in a common work area, have the status meeting in the work area and save the time going to and from conference rooms.

Ceremony description assignment: In the ceremony description, update the structure to include standing in a circle.

Step 7: *Anyone can start and end the ceremony*

Define a formal start and end to the ceremony and have different people start and end the ceremony for each meeting.

If you are using a talking stick, then the ceremony officially begins when any member raises the stick in the air. They raise the stick in the air, everyone gets quiet, and they begin reporting their status. When they are done reporting their status, they pass the stick to a new team member. The ceremony officially ends when everyone has spoken once and nobody else asks to speak, and the person

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holding the talking stick officially puts the stick down.

If you are not using a talking stick, perhaps because you are having the meeting on-line, then you need to define a different starting and end signal.

By this time, the team members should begin to see the ceremony as reporting to each other and holding each other accountable, not reporting to the manager. They should be holding the ceremony even if the manager doesn't attend.

Ceremony description assignment: In the ceremony description, update the structure to include how it starts and ends.

Step 8: *Hold it more frequently*

If your original status meeting was held only once a week, start holding it more frequently, perhaps at the beginning of every day. Holding a short meeting frequently provides increased motivation, rapid feedback, and more opportunities for concerns to be made public and addressed.

Step 9: *Name the ceremony*

Have the team name the ceremony. We've seen names like Daily Standup, Daily Huddle, and Heartbeat. Ensure the team agrees on the purpose of the ceremony. For example: the purpose is to synchronize the team, to understand the progress of others, and to identify concerns that are slowing the participants down or risking success. Everyone in attendance is expected to help work the concerns.

Ceremony description assignment: In the ceremony description, record the ceremony name.

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Health Check

At the end of these steps we have the distinct possibility that our meeting has been transformed into a ceremony. The measure of its success is:

- Does the ceremony accomplish the purpose?
- Is the ceremony worth the sacrifice?
- Do the participants receive positive emotional energy?

Only if **all three answers are yes** do we truly consider the ceremony successful. If it does, the participants will continue the ceremony without outside pressure. If it doesn't, you will need to evolve or abandon the ceremonial structure and try something else.

If you can abandon the ceremony and nobody notices, then the ceremony wasn't serving a useful purpose, wasn't worth the sacrifice, and we shouldn't care.

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Discovering Ceremony Together

Actively creating new ceremony is challenging to most people. If you are implementing these steps and would like some assistance, give us a call—an hour of talking with a coach can save you months of struggles.

Because we so believe the best way for you to move forward is with active coaching, we offer a *free* one-hour *Ceremony Coaching Session*.

Free One-Hour Ceremony Coaching Session

If you are working your way through the steps, then you likely have many questions. We have answers. Call us today for a free one-hour review of your ceremony and your progress working directly with Tom Meloche or Kyle Griffin.

Limited Time Offer

Call Today

734-355-0983

We will answer questions, provide insights, offer challenges, and coach you on your journey. We have helped hundreds of teams improve performance and outcomes using ceremony. Let our experience improve your experience.

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Elements of Ceremony

You don't have to create each ceremonial structure from scratch. We can leverage existing successful ceremonial elements which have come down to us through the ages, five included in this starter kit are:

Circling

Circling is physically arranging participants in a circle, positioned so they can easily see the faces of all of the other participants. Circling facilitates communication on an equal status footing.

Radiating

Radiating is continually communicating information by making it visually present in the environment. Radiating is making information visible and transparent.

Standing

Standing is where everyone stands for part or all of a ceremony. Daily Status Meeting ceremonies use standing as a technique to intentionally keep the ceremony short, not allowing people to get comfortable sitting around a table.

Talking Stick

A talking stick is used to focus attention on the person speaking and eliminate or reduce active conversations and interruptions. Only the person holding the talking stick (any visible item) is allowed to speak.

Time-Boxing

Time-boxing is limiting the ceremony by time. The ceremony is always over after a certain period of time has elapsed. The purpose of time-boxing is to increase focus and maintain the ceremony's energy level.

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Satisfaction Quiz

The following question should be printed and given anonymously to each member of the team before making the first change to your existing status meeting.

Use the Metrics Tracking spreadsheet to track your progress over time.

The question should then be asked to your team frequently (perhaps weekly) as you add new ceremonial structures to the meeting. When the ceremony consistently scores an average of 9 or 10 you have likely arrived at a strong positive emotional state.

Satisfaction Quiz

On a scale of 0 to 10 would you recommend this approach to a meeting to a friend doing similar work?

Never

Absolutely

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How would you further improve this meeting?

*For descriptions of additional ceremonies
you can use in your organization*

visit TomMeloche.com