Incentives and Deterrents

Encouraging People to Arrive on Time for the Daily Scrum

by Mike Cohn
One way to encourage everyone to arrive on time for the daily scrum is by establishing some incentives for being on time or deterrents for being late.

An example of an incentive would be celebrating with a team lunch on the last day of the sprint if everyone is on time for every daily scrum during the sprint. An example of a deterrent could be that whoever is late has to bring a snack for the team the next day.

Always be sure that the entire team is involved in choosing an incentive or deterrent, especially when selecting a deterrent. And generally, I’d favor choosing an incentive. But some teams can have a lot of fun with deterrents—again, as long as everyone is bought into it.

**Incentives**

- Reward the first people to arrive with small bits of chocolate.
- Collect a dollar or two for being late, but when the money is donated to a charity, donate it in the name of the person who arrived first at the meeting most often. Since charitable contributions are tax deductible in many countries, this gives incentives for being early and for not being late. Or as Michel Biron pointed out, it was both “carrot and stick.”
- Give everyone who was prompt for each daily scrum a reward like a two-hour lunch or permission to come in late and leave early one day.
- Everyone who was on time for each daily scrum goes to a movie during the day, one day during the next sprint.
- A photo of the team holding a sign saying: “We did it!”
- Start the meeting 15 minutes before everyone wants to go to lunch. Viktor Buzga told me that the company cafeteria in his company gets very crowded at 11:30 when it opens. Arrive at 11:30 and there’s no wait for lunch. Arrive two minutes later and there’s a 10-minute wait. So he starts daily scrums at 11:15. If the team finishes in 10-12 minutes, they’re perfectly timed for lunch. If not ...
**Deterrents**

- Anyone late must read a tongue-twister to the team (“Seventy-seven benevolent elephants” or “Scum-sucking Scrum teams scrounge scrumptious scraps.”)
- Anyone late must dance alone without music for five seconds. Rob Dull reported, “It’s quick, amusing for everyone, and it’s a healthy encouragement of vulnerability.”
- Whoever is late must bring coffee or a snack for the team the next day. Be careful—a few people emailed about gaining weight from this one! :)
- Have a “tardy board” as Nadine Sullivan called it that tracks late arrivals or absences. Add rules like everyone is allowed one late arrival during some period. But after reaching some number of late arrivals or absences, the person has to bring something in such as a snack for the team.
- Toss a beach ball, stuffed animal or some other item to the person who is to speak next. Throw, don’t toss, it at any late arrivals.
- Whoever is late must buy the team an afternoon snack or tea.
- Present a 30-minute knowledge sharing session on a topic. This was pointed out as being particularly helpful in team building.
- Have whoever is late most frequently during a sprint, facilitate the next review or retrospective.
- Have whoever is late most frequently during a sprint, facilitate the next daily scrum, meaning everyone is waiting for tomorrow’s meeting to start if today’s late arriver is late again.
- If someone is late, they become the team’s “slave for a day” by doing things like getting snacks, soda and coffee for anyone who needed anything from the kitchen.
- Whoever is late must take detailed, precise notes for the team’s next meeting.
- Whoever is late is asked to solve a tricky math problem on the board.
- Whoever is late most during a sprint must buy a book for the office library. How about *one one my books*? :)
- Close the door right at the official start time. A late arriver has to open it to enter, which focuses attention on the person.
- If late, take on a short (perhaps 15-minute) administrative task the team needs done.
- Simply put an indicator to each person’s name on a wall to show how frequently each team member was late.