

BEP 313 – Project Management 4: Scrum Stand-up Meetings (Part 1)

Hello and welcome back to Business English Pod. My name's Edwin, and I'll be your host for today's lesson on conducting a scrum stand-up meeting.

Not everyone likes meetings, and for good reason. Many meetings are poorly organized and poorly run. But meetings are a necessary part of work and business, especially in project management. For this reason, it's important that we find ways to have *good* meetings.

If you've worked in software development, especially agile environments, you'll know about one excellent kind of meeting called a scrum or stand-up meeting. Scrum is an approach to software development that uses cross-functional teams. Each day, the team has a short stand-up meeting where people update others on progress, plans, and challenges.

Whether or not you work in software development, leading a scrum style meeting is a useful experience. You'll have to do many things that apply to *all* good meetings. For example, you'll need to open the meeting and ask for updates. You may also find the chance to suggest collaboration between team members. And the person running the meeting is also responsible for putting aside, or sidebarring, issues that can be discussed *after* the meeting. These are all techniques that can help you in any kind of meeting, whether you work with scrum or not.

In today's dialog, we'll hear Jill, a project manager and scrum master, leading a daily scrum meeting. We'll also hear two team members, Katherine and Sam. Sam will be first to provide his updates. And, as you'll hear, Jill will help keep the team focused.

As you listen to the dialog, try to answer the following questions:

1. When she opens the meeting, what does Jill suggest they do to stay focused?
2. When Sam says what he is going to do today, what does Jill suggest?
3. What issue does Jill want to "sidebar," or leave for after the meeting?

Vocabulary

Impediment: an obstacle, or something that stops or delays you from doing something; "The new environmental regulations are a serious impediment to doing business in this city."

To sidebar something: to delay dealing with something; "Good question Tony, but let's sidebar that issue for now because we already have lots to talk about."

To hold someone up: to create a delay; "Sorry everyone, but I was held up on the freeway by a big accident."

"No matter:" that's not important or that doesn't matter; "A: Come on Dave, it's 5:30 already. Let's all go home. B: No matter Gwen, we absolutely have to finish this."

Up first: the first to take a turn; "All right it's time for your weekly reports. Celine, you're up first. Let's hear it."

Schema: a structure or plan, especially of a database; "After drafting the schema, you should sit down with the client's IT people and just make sure it's workable."

Route optimization: the process of finding the best or most efficient route or plan of travel; "Improved route optimization has helped Dylan Trucking save thousands of dollars every month on fuel."

To double-check: to check again to make sure something is right; "I've looked over the proposal already, but Ryan do you mind just double-checking everything for me?"

To dig into: to start working on; "If we're done the quarterly report, how about we dig into the sales projections for next year?"

API: a set of tools or rules that allows computer programs to communicate with each other; "Yeah, the latest data won't load because there's a problem with the API."

Legacy system: an old or existing computer system, software, or technology; "So, I had a look at the client's legacy system, and I think it needs to be completely replaced."

To team up with someone: to work together with someone; "We don't have the equipment for this job, so why don't we team up with Ambro Engineering on the project?"

On board: involved in something or part of a group; "Now that Jan is gone, we need to find another tester to bring on board."

Dev /Developer: a person who creates new technologies or software; "A two-month delay on the new software? Let's get the lead dev on the phone and see what's going on."

To drag on: to continue longer than necessary or desired; "All this rain has meant that construction has dragged on for a month longer than we had planned."

Unresponsive: not reacting or responding quickly or at all; "Yeah I've emailed and called several times, but Frank has been completely unresponsive."

"I know what you're saying:" I understand; "A: We're really running out of office space. B: I know what you're saying, but we can't think about moving right now."

"Fair enough:" I understand and accept what you say; "A: Listen, I haven't had a day off in two weeks. B: Fair enough. I think you deserve a long weekend."

To reach out to someone: to ask someone for help; "Instead of getting so frustrated, why don't you reach out to tech support and see if they can get your computer working?"

Dialog

Jill: All right, my phone says 9:00 so let's get started. Remember: doing, done, and any **impediments**. And let's **sidebar** anything that might **hold** us **up**.

Katherine: Right... But... I notice Dave's not here.

Sam: **No matter** Kath. Gotta start on time.

Jill: Right... so how about we go around clockwise. Sam, you're **up first**. How did it go yesterday?

Sam: Yeah... okay. So, yesterday I worked with Dave, laying out the new database **schema** for the **route optimization** side of things. We've **double-checked** everything and we're pretty happy with how it looks so... I'll just move that over to "complete..."

Jill: Great.

Sam: And for today I'm going to start **digging into** the **APIs** for the **legacy system**.

Jill: Alright...uh... you might want to **team up with** Anne on that. Those API's are a real mess so I think she'll be good to have **on board** for that.

Sam: Yeah that would help... so Anne can we chat about that later? I'm not sure I have everything I need from their **devs** just yet.

Jill: Still? That's been **dragging on** for a while hasn't it?

Sam: Yeah, seems to be the way things go over there... I'm not sure about you, but I've found Liam to be really... Uhh... **unresponsive**. Perhaps we need to take a different approach there?

Jill: **I know what you're saying**... But I think we should sidebar that for now.

Sam: **Fair enough**. Let's talk later.

Jill: Right. So, does that take care of impediments? Anything else?

Sam: No I think that's it.

Jill: Great. So... looks like you're up next Ali... how did everything go today with your meeting with Jen?... [Fade out]

Debrief

Now let's go through the dialog again and look at the language and techniques Jill used to lead the meeting. And just so you know, in a scrum meeting each team member is supposed to report on what they did yesterday, what they will do today, and any impediments, or obstacles to their work.

Jill: All right, my phone says 9:00 so let's get started. Remember: doing, done, and any **impediments**. And let's **sidebar** anything that might **hold us up**.

As you can hear, Jill starts the meeting right on time. This is *especially* important in a scrum stand-up, because the meeting should only be 15 minutes long. And besides saying "let's get started," which is a simple and effective way to open a meeting, she reminds people of their purpose.

She also mentions that she wants to "sidebar" anything that causes delays. If you "sidebar" an issue, you leave it for after the meeting, rather than discussing it with *everybody* during the meeting. Everything Jill does helps to set the right tone for a productive and focused meeting.

What are some other good ways you can open a scrum meeting? Let's run through a few more examples.

- Okay, we've got 15 minutes, so let's get started.
- All right, it's time to begin, and maybe I can just start with what I did yesterday.
- Let's go around the circle with what you did, what you're going to do, and any impediments.
- Time is short, so let's get going. Remember: everyone has 2 minutes to speak, so please sidebar anything that might hold us up.

Starting a meeting on time is important, even if not everyone is there, as you can hear.

Katherine: Right... But... I notice Dave's not here.

Sam: **No matter** Kath. Gotta start on time.

Jill: Right... so how about we go around clockwise. Sam, you're **up first**. How did it go yesterday?

Jill doesn't waste any time getting into the business of the meeting. In a scrum stand-up, team members go around in a circle giving their updates. As Jill says, she wants to go around clockwise, telling Sam he is "up first," meaning it's his turn to speak first. Remember, a scrum meeting is about sharing brief updates. So Jill asks Sam for the first part of his update, which is what he did the day before.

When you ask for updates, it's good to be clear about whose turn it is. And as Jill shows, you can ask specifically for the information you want.

Let's practice some more ways of asking for updates:

- Let's start with you Charlie. What did you do yesterday?
- Erin you're next. Let's hear how things are going.
- Sounds good, and do you have any impediments to report?
- Norm, looks like it's your turn. I think you've got updates on the database?

So let's hear Sam's update.

Sam: Yeah... okay. So, yesterday I worked with Dave, laying out the new database **schema** for the **route optimization** side of things. We've **double-checked** everything and we're pretty happy with how it looks so... I'll just move that over to "complete..."

Jill: Great.

Sam: And for today I'm going to start **digging into** the **APIs** for the **legacy system**.

Sam started with what he did yesterday, as is usual in a scrum update. He's happy to report that he finished the new database "schema," or structure. And because that's complete, he can move on to something different today. As he says, he'll "dig into," or start working on, the APIs for the legacy system. In non-technical terms, he'll be working on how the new software will communicate with the old software.

What does Jill think of Sam's plan to dig into the APIs?

Jill: Alright...uh... you might want to **team up with** Anne on that. Those API's are a real mess so I think she'll be good to have **on board** for that.

Remember, Jill is the scrum master. Part of her job is to help organize the work of the project, and that might mean putting the right people together. Jill is suggesting that Sam "team up with," or collaborate, with Anne on the APIs.

When you make suggestions, you should be careful with your language. In most cases, you don't want to be too forceful. As you heard, Jill said "you might want to team up with Anne." Other ways of making gentle suggestions include "I would suggest," "why don't you," and "it might be a good idea." Let's try some more language for suggesting collaboration.

- If you need some help, I'd suggest **reaching out** to Frank.
- Why don't you work with Ray and Dana on the design?
- It might be a good idea to get some input from the marketing team on that.
- I think you should talk to Sara about working together on the website.

So how does Sam respond to Jill's suggestion?

Sam: Yeah that would help... so Anne can we chat about that later? I'm not sure I have everything I need from their **devs** just yet.

Jill: Still? That's been **dragging on** for a while hasn't it?

Sam: Yeah, seems to be the way things go over there... I'm not sure about you, but I've found Liam to be really... Uhh... **unresponsive**. Perhaps we need to take a different approach there?

Sam has just brought up what we call an "impediment," or something that stops or slows down progress. The problem is that he doesn't have everything from the client's "devs," or developers, and he wonders if they need to take a different approach with the client.

But is this a problem that Jill thinks needs to be discussed right now?

Jill: **I know what you're saying...** But I think we should sidebar that for now.

Getting information from the client is an important issue, but it doesn't involve everyone on the team, and the meeting is only 15 minutes. So Jill decides to "sidebar" the issue, or discuss it *after* the meeting. Notice that she uses a "yes... but..." structure to sidebar the issue. She says she understands – or "I know what you're saying" – before saying they should leave the issue for later.

Once again, Jill is avoiding being too direct or aggressive. She's using careful or soft language to direct the meeting. You'll hear more of this careful language as we run through some more examples of sidebarring an issue.

- I think it's best to leave that issue for after the meeting.
- The timeline is important, but let's sidebar that for now and focus on updates.
- Maybe you can discuss those issues with Anne after our meeting.
- I'd like to leave those kinds of problems aside for now.

Let's listen as Sam's turn in the meeting comes to an end.

Sam: **Fair enough.** Let's talk later.

Jill: Right. So, does that take care of impediments? Anything else?

Sam: No I think that's it.

Jill: Great. So... looks like you're up next Ali... how did everything go today with your meeting with Jen?...

When Sam says he has no more impediments to report, Jill doesn't hesitate to move on to the next person in the circle. And as you've heard in the dialog, she's opened and led the meeting with the right focus and respect for the team members.

Now let's practice some of the language we learned in today's lesson.

Imagine you are working as scrum master on a software project. You are running a daily scrum meeting. You'll start by opening the meeting, then asking one of the team members for updates. After opening the meeting, you'll hear a cue from a team member and then I'll give you a suggestion for what you can say in response. We'll guide you through each step in the practice and provide an example answer for each response.

Ready? Let's give it a go.

First, open the meeting by saying good morning and telling everyone you'd like to get started.

Answer: _____

Cue 2: Sounds like a great idea.

Next ask the team member named Jamie to start with his updates.

Answer: _____

Cue 3: Well, yesterday I worked on the design, and today I'll continue with that.

Now, suggest that Jamie work together with Anne on the design.

Answer: _____

Cue 4: All right, but first I'd love some feedback on what I've done so far.

Now say that you'd like to sidebar any feedback until after the meeting.

Answer: _____

Answer 1: Well, good morning everyone. Can we get started now?

Answer 2: Okay, Jamie, let's start with your updates first please.

Answer 3: Okay, and you might want to work together with Anne on the design.

Answer 4: Let's sidebar that for now and discuss it after the meeting.

Now let's practice some of the vocabulary we've covered in this lesson. In a moment, you'll hear a series of sentences with a word replaced with a beep. Repeat each sentence, *including* the missing word.

For example, if you hear:

Example Cue: Okay Karla, looks like you're up <bEEP> as we go around the circle.

You can say:

Example Cue: Okay Karla, looks like you're up **first** as we go around the circle.

After each response, we'll provide the correct answer. Let's begin.

Cue 1: Ian, could you read my report just to double- **<beep>** I haven't missed anything?

Answer: _____

Cue 2: All right everyone, I'm really glad to have you all on **<beep>** for this project.

Answer: _____

Cue 3: We'll need to make sure this software works with their legacy **<beep>**.

Answer: _____

Cue 4: Sorry Bob, but I think we should **<beep>** that issue until after the meeting.

Answer: _____

Answer 1: Ian, could you read my report just to double-**check** I haven't missed anything?

Answer 2: All right everyone, I'm really glad to have you all on **board** for this project.

Answer 3: We'll need to make sure this software works with their legacy **system**.

Answer 4: Sorry Bob, but I think we should **sidebar** that issue until after the meeting.

We've reached the end of this lesson, the fourth in our series on project management, and the first of two on scrum stand-up meetings. We've learned how to open a meeting and ask for updates. We've also covered how to suggest collaboration and how to sidebar an issue for after the meeting.

Thanks for listening and see you again soon!

Language Review

A. Review Quiz

For each question, you must choose the sentence that best fulfills the given language function or purpose.

1. What is a good way to open a scrum meeting?
 - a) All right, we've waited long enough for late people. Who'd like to start?
 - b) If I can just start out here by asking if there are any agenda items to add?
 - c) Okay, we've only got 15 minutes so let's get going. Tanya, we'll start with you.
2. How might you ask for updates?
 - a) Hank, it's your turn. Let's hear what you did yesterday.
 - b) So, who else has something they'd like to report?
 - c) Tina, any idea how we might tackle this problem?
3. What is a good way to suggest collaboration?
 - a) Nina will be able to take care of that if you can't.
 - b) It might be a good idea to ask Nina for some help on that.
 - c) Sorry Gus but I'd like you to pass that off to Nina if you don't mind.
4. How can you sidebar an issue that comes up during a meeting?
 - a) Actually, that's an issue that Brian might be able to speak about.
 - b) Well, we've talked about that before so there's really no need.
 - c) Maybe we can just leave that for discussion after the meeting.

B. Vocabulary and Idioms

Fill in the blanks with words from the box below. Be sure to put any verbs in the right tense.

**team
board**

**reach
dig**

**hold
drag**

1. Gosh, can you believe how long that staff meeting _____ on for?
2. If the client _____ you up at all with too many questions, just send me a text.
3. I see you're having a bit of difficulty with the Javascript. You might want to _____ out to Wanda for help with that.
4. We've got a couple of marketing managers _____ up with our senior sales executive to create a new sales plan.
5. So, if you're all done with the website updates, how about _____ into the database fixes?
6. Now that we have Josh on _____, we should be able to finish the project ahead of time.

Study Strategy

When you chair or lead a meeting, people rely on you to keep the meeting focused and help the team figure out how to work better. That may mean suggesting collaboration when a team member faces an obstacle; it may also mean sidebarring an issue that isn't directly relevant to the meeting.

Think about a regular meeting that you have to lead or attend. In this exercise, you're going to practice leading the meeting, but it's okay if you are not normally the chairperson. It could be a project meeting, a staff meeting, or a scrum stand-up. Write down the primary purpose of the meeting.

Next, make a list of 5 to 7 impediments or obstacles that people on the team might face. Then make a list of 5 to 7 issues that team members might bring up that are off topic.

Now, with a colleague or friend, imagine you are leading the meeting. Start by asking for updates. Your partner can then choose to report an obstacle or raise an issue that is off-topic. If your partner reports an obstacle, suggest collaboration. If your partner raises an off-topic issue, sidebar it. Continue until you've addressed all the impediments and issues. When you're done, switch roles and let your partner try.

Answers

Listening Questions

1. Jill suggests they sidebar any issue that comes up that might delay them.
2. Jill suggests Sam collaborate with Anne on the APIs.
3. Jill wants to sidebar the issue of how to approach the unresponsive client.

A. Review Quiz

1. c; 2. a; 3. b; 4. c

B. Vocabulary and Idioms

1. Gosh, can you believe how long that staff meeting **dragged** on for?
2. If the client **holds** you up at all with too many questions, just send me a text.
3. I see you're having a bit of difficulty with the Javascript. You might want to **reach** out to Wanda for help with that.
4. We've got a couple of marketing managers **teaming** up with our senior sales executive to create a new sales plan.
5. So, if you're all done with the website updates, how about **digging** into the database fixes?
6. Now that we have Josh on **board**, we should be able to finish the project ahead of time.