

Ask the Genie!

Dear Genie,

I'm a new project manager and I've been having sporadic status meetings with my team, but they're NOT WORKING. The status meetings seem to turn into a big vent session, and I'm not really getting the information that I need. Most people seem to just call in to say "everything is fine" while others insist they have a schedule conflict and can't participate. Is there anything I can do to get us on the right track?

Julie in Lexington

Dear Julie,

In a word, YES! There is help. Let's explore a few things you can begin doing immediately to enhance the effectiveness of your status meetings.

- Get the team to agree to a regularly scheduled time for your status meetings (e.g. Mondays 9:00 - 10:00, every other Tuesday 2:00 - 4:00, etc.). Don't try to schedule them sporadically.
- Emphasize the importance of attending status meetings and discuss the procedures around missing a meeting (e.g. submitting status information to you prior to the meeting, sending a substitute, etc.)
- Clarify EXACTLY what information you want each team member to provide during the status meeting. One of the easiest ways to do this is by developing a brief project status update form (typically includes schedule/budget/quality variance, potential risks, and issues). Insist that team members complete the form prior to the meeting.
- Let the team know that vague terms like "soon, asap, costly" are not sufficient for status updates. Instead, each team member should quantify/specify as much as possible (e.g. within 3 days, 2 defects, \$50,000, etc.)
- Develop a ground rule that anyone who voices a complaint must also suggest a solution. Develop a habit of asking the "venter" to take an action to identify potential solutions or next steps for the issue and provide an update during a future meeting.
- Don't allow team members to just report "everything is fine". Press them for specific feedback on tasks, schedule, budget, quality levels, customer interactions, technology performance, etc.
- Insist on having team members update the status of their action items or tasks in the appropriate spreadsheet/database before the action item/task due date.
- Post a Risk List in the project war room (or on a Powerpoint slide if meeting virtually). Ask each person to document any potential risks on a bright pink post it and post it on the Risk List prior to the start of the meeting.

If you have a question that you'd like to pose to the Meeting Genie, send it (along with your name and city) to askgenie@meetinggenie.com