FACILITATOR'S GUIDE
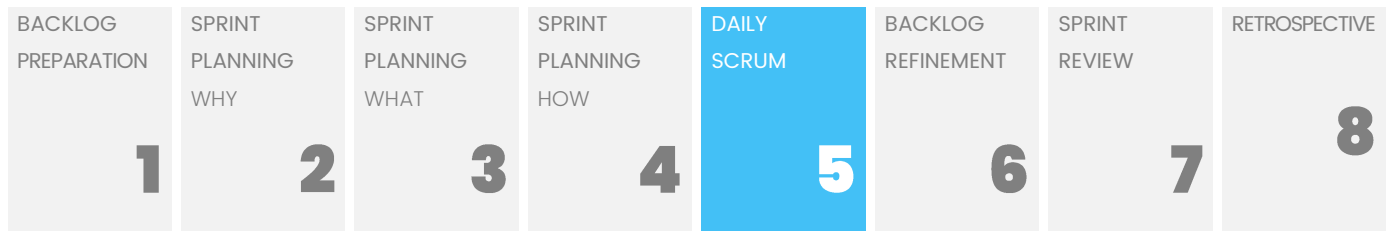
SCRUM MASTER'S PROMPTS

Best practices for supporting agile teams to be self-managing and cross-functional.

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

SCRUM MASTER PROMPTS

BACKLOG PREPARATION	SPRINT PLANNING WHY	SPRINT PLANNING WHAT	SPRINT PLANNING HOW	DAILY SCRUM	BACKLOG REFINEMENT	SPRINT REVIEW	RETROSPECTIVE
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**

A Scrum Master's role requires not only facilitation of Scrum's events, but also to help the Scrum Team to self-manage. The Daily Scrum is a prime opportunity to do this. An effective Scrum Master will help a team with the Daily Scrum by asking questions to help clarify progress toward the Sprint Goal, prompt others to leverage their expertise and skills to create a plan for the day, and encourage team members to assist each other to complete Product Backlog items in the most practical and efficient way possible.

KEY OUTCOMES

- **Inspect and adapt** – The Scrum Master should be able to help the team understand their progress toward the Sprint Goal. Setting the scene for the Daily Scrum by reminding the team of its goal, highlighting its progress by using burndown charts, and pointing out what is in-progress, all help the team understand and provide transparency on where they're at.
- **Create transparency** – The Scrum Master should encourage people who are doing the work to make it visible. Making work visible doesn't mean comprehensive documentation, it means creating just enough information so that everyone understands who is doing what, how it helps them get to the Sprint Goal, how it contributes to the Increment, and whether the work is at risk. Use of a Scrum board (physical or digital) helps keep work transparent. Encourage individuals to update their work on the board – it's not the Scrum Master's job to manage the board.
- **Improve collaboration** – The Scrum Master should provide a safe space for Developers to talk freely and openly about what is going on. The Daily Scrum is not a status report but an opportunity for Developers share knowledge of how it is achieving its Sprint Goal. The Scrum Master should ensure that the right people are present and ensure that everyone knows when and where to meet by sending notifications and reminders well before the meeting. If key meetings are in the same place and the same time each day, it will be easier for Developers remember what is expected of them.
- **Identify risks** – Identify the risks that are impeding the Developers' ability to achieve the Sprint Goal. The main risks are most likely to be PBIs that are ill-defined and are taking longer than originally estimated. They can and often do result in Developers delivering nothing at all for the entire Sprint. These PBIs should be parked and are a prime candidate for Backlog Refinement in preparation for the next Sprint. The impediment may also be external dependencies or factors outside the team's control. If work puts the Sprint Goal at risk, then the Product Owner should be consulted immediately.
- **Knowledge sharing** – Encourage the Team to meet to further discuss features, scope, requirements and other elements of a PBI after the Daily Scrum. Pairing is an effective mechanism to quickly share knowledge of an issue and collectively decide on a plan of attack.

Prompts to create clarity

- What does that involve?
- Is that related to the Sprint Goal?
- How does that contribute to the Increment?
- Do you think it meets the Definition of Done?
- Are there any subject matter experts you need to talk to?
- Could things be done smarter (not faster) if someone from the team helped out?
- Anyone provide a different point of view on this work?
- Are you waiting on someone to finish that?
- Is this progressing slower than you thought it would? Why do you think that is?
- Running out of time? What do you think is the cause of that? Make a note now for our Retrospective.
- Do we need to park that issue?
- Are there any dependencies?
- Have you taken on too much right now?
- Are we overloaded? Have we taken on too much as a team? Is it time to negotiate work with the Product Owner?

Removing obstacles by encouraging the team to self-manage

- Does the rest of the team know this is a problem?
- Why do you think this occurred?
- How do you think this occurred?
- What did you solve the problem last time?
- Is there something that someone in the team can do to help?
- Is there a stakeholder who can help progress the issue?
- Is there someone in another team who can help progress the issue?
- What did you or the team do last time to solve the problem?
- Do we know another team that could help us out?
- Do you need to talk to the Product Owner about this?

Removing obstacles when it's clear that the team can't solve the issue themselves

- Do you need me to act on your behalf?
- Does this need to be escalated to management?
- Do we need to involve the Product Owner on this?

Prompts for increasing transparency

- Are you working on too many things at once?
- Are there any impediments?
- When did that happen?
- Any new risks or issues?
- Is that reflected on the Task Board?
- Why don't you create a Product Backlog item (PBI) and put it into the Product Backlog?
- Should you discuss that with the Product Owner?
- Is that a candidate for refinement for a new/existing PBI with the Product Owner?

Phrases to avoid

- When will you finish that?
- Are you working at full capacity?
- What is your capacity?

- That doesn't sound like a very efficient use of your time.
- Where are you up to with that?
- Do you have any other Product Backlog items to do?
- Is that what you'll be working on?
- What about [this] task?

ABOUT ZEN EX MACHINA

Zen Ex Machina (ZXM) provides independent and objective agile coaching and consulting, founded in organisational psychology, culture and change management, to help leaders succeed in their organisations. Ranging in scope from a short strategy session to full agile operating models, ZXM services connect you directly with experienced, certified agile practitioners who apply expert insight to your specific strategic and operational challenges.

Zen Ex Machina™, ZXM™, Agile IQ® are trademarks of Zen Ex Machina Pty Ltd. All other trademarks are the property of their respective companies.