

# The Awkward Truths of Celebrating Small Victories

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Last December, I was asked to take over the effort to launch my group's new website, a project that had languished for the better part of three years. I will be honest: I didn't think it would be very hard. However, I quickly realized that one of the reasons the project had been spiraling out of control was because no one understood what the true status of the project was. And it was not good.

Despite my initial confidence, the project went downhill quickly, and the negativity was suffocating. Out of desperation, I began searching for any and all small victories that could help motivate me to keep pushing forward, which essentially was just about developing manageable to-do lists. It helped, but I realized that what I actually needed was positive feedback from others as well.

Unfortunately the idea of sending out an email about celebrating small victories to my entire team made me sick to my stomach. Like, ugh.... I just couldn't. Instead, I forced myself to use "small victories" language in all my conversations. I joked that I was looking for any and all small victories to my colleagues, told my boss that I was focusing on one small victory for a day, and then finally worked up the courage to send out "small victory alerts!" to teammates working on a particular project. It was definitely tongue-in-cheek; it was sort of joking, and it totally worked.

The painfully small and awkward attempts at celebrations started shifting our culture. Teammates began adopting the "small victories" phrase and jumped on board with their commitment to celebrate them. A fun artifact that symbolizes the transformation is our internal messenger system (Slack) that is now riddled with the party hat emoticon as we intentionally celebrate updates from our teammates. The mood surrounding the work and the way we discuss the every day challenges of our job have changed dramatically and for the better.

I can still think of 2,000 things I'd rather do than send out an email celebrating a small accomplishment. It is definitely still awkward. But it's also worth it, and I encourage anyone dealing with a potentially soul-crushing project to try it out. If you do, here are a few suggestions:

1) Be obvious. My teammates are awesome, but human, and they had no way of knowing what I was trying to do (making the effort to acknowledge and celebrate our progress) before I actually

started doing it. Don't be shy about saying what you're trying to do. Make it a joke, let it be silly, but say it clearly.

2) Think about your forum. Whether it is in face-to-face meetings, phone calls, emails, or messaging systems, your forum matters. The main thing is to celebrate in a way that lets as many people on the team participate. For me, clogging up everyone's inbox wasn't the best way. But Slack worked perfectly!

3) Remember that providing updates is not the same as celebrating. If you want others to celebrate, you've got to do it first. So add a "yay" and that party hat emoji in there to make it clear that something significant was accomplished!

Of course, with all this said, I still feel awkward writing about this and celebrating my own accomplishment. However, I cannot overstate the impact it had on me and my team as we worked to push a huge project across the finish line. I'm proud of our work, and I'm incredibly proud of the culture we've built to be able to celebrate it!

So... yay!