

## How Informed K12's engineering lead uses Check-ins to enhance his team's daily standup



After using Range at Twitter, Ethan Schlenker brought it to support his team at an education startup



When Ethan joined [Informed K12](#), a startup focused on helping school district administrators operate efficiently and gain insight into their most critical school business processes, he wanted to establish practices to best support his six-person engineering team. As the lead manager for the entire engineering team, he needed to know how work was moving forward and how his team was doing. At the same time, Ethan was especially conscious of avoiding processes that smacked of micromanagement.

In his previous role at Twitter, he'd managed a larger engineering team, and he'd felt that tension there as well, but then they started to use Range.

"At Twitter, I had a team of 25, and doing a standup for that many people is crazy. We'd broken into squads, but those teams were all running in their own way, which made it hard for me as a manager to know how each team member was holding themselves accountable each day. I had a general sense of how projects were going, but I didn't have a day-to-day status. When I was at Twitter, I don't think we recognized we needed Range until we saw what it could do."



### Live long and check-in

For those who can't mind meld, check-ins are appreciated. Thanks for sharing yours.

### Putting Check-ins to work

At Twitter, teams used Range to run daily standups in different ways using Check-ins. Each day, team members create a Check-in which captures what they plan to do and what they've done and bring in their work — such as pull requests or docs — along with relevant context, as well as flag any blockers. People can also report on their mood with a green, yellow, red system and an emoji, and answer a daily team-building question. Ethan often used the Team Directory feature to understand how other teams he was dependent on for different projects were progressing. Rather than having to chase down an update, he could just take a look at their Check-ins.

“In both places, the onboarding with Range was something I was concerned about at first because developers can be kind of persnickety about what you’re asking them to do, how you’re keeping track of things,” Ethan explains. “Coding is creative work, and I’m always wary as a manager of things that might help me out, but are detrimental to the team’s process. I want to make sure I’m respecting their space and not making them feel micromanaged. But with Range, everyone picked it up pretty easily. It gave people a shared to-do list where they could see what was going on, and everyone felt that value quickly.”

### **Managing the manager role**

While some teams use Check-ins to replace their standup, Ethan wanted it to augment his team’s daily meeting, not weigh it down. He found the Informed K12 office culture really strong, and meeting-lite. They held a daily standup for 30 minutes, and as they shifted to working remotely, that standup was the one time to see each other.

“At Informed K12, we’ve found Range does a really nice job of taking that accountability piece and making it something that doesn’t necessarily have to happen in the standup,” he says. “That’s been particularly useful during shelter-in-place. We know at least once a day we’ll come together as a team, see each other’s faces, connect, crack some jokes. In general, you want standups to be functional — this is what I did, this is what I’m going to do — and not talking about this funny thing that happened.”

“Range makes sure we have the functional part covered,” he continues. “It helps developers have a plan for their day and gives visibility into what’s happening. That also helps our standup meeting be more holistic in nature. We can have really good short morning meetings with the team where we don’t have to get too much into the perfunctory accountability stuff — it’s all captured in Range for everyone to see. As a manager, I can use that time to talk to my team and make sure everyone is doing OK. I don’t have to hound anybody to make sure they are putting their information into Range — the team has really taken to it.

“It makes it really easy to see what people are working on, how they’re connecting and following up with each other without having to chase those updates down. It’s been great, and a real pleasure to have this part of my manager life taken care of.”

## An introspective retrospective

Being able to see all of the work people have done and how they are feeling is really useful for both 1:1s and retros. Rather than just a list of items, you have the context of what was happening at the time because people write the Check-ins themselves.


“At the beginning of this year, we’re doing 2020 retros, and it was great to have that extra context. For example, you can pull up all your tickets for the year and all your pull requests for the year, and because the entries are written in their voice in Range, you get more nuance and understand what was important to them. It’s much more personal. And I use it for all my 1:1s.”

## Tuning into what happens

Being able to sense the wellbeing of the team and strengthen team culture every day is a key factor that Ethan thinks sets Range apart from other tools.

“One of the reasons I really appreciated Range from the get-go is their goal of making work better, not ‘giving managers more information’. There are other tools I’ve looked at that are similar and feel very chart focused. As in ‘what are things that are easy to count, lines of code, etc, and let’s track those’. But those things that are easy to count aren’t necessarily helpful.”

“What Range does so well is introduce thematic daily questions that focus on how the team works. So we’re able to talk about feedback for a week. A lot of those questions actually lead to interesting conversations on the team, whether that’s people finding out who likes horror movies and who doesn’t or really meaningful ones around different working styles. And having them come from an outside place as opposed to me the manager saying ‘let’s talk about feedback and everyone going, ‘oh, OK, yeah.’

How do you feel today? 

Green	Yellow	Red

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[Publish check-in](#) [Share with your team !\[\]\(632f1a3f918406f20821b84163da8de5\_img.jpg\)](#)

“And I love the red, yellow, green mood temperature check. For this year especially that’s given people a way to raise a flag — ‘the news is stressing me out, I am not in a good place right now’. They can click on the sad emoji face on the red side and as a manager that’s so helpful because I can check in with them and ask ‘are you in a place where work is a good escape for today, or are you in a place where work makes it more stressful today,” he says.

“Especially as a remote manager, I can have those conversations much more effectively. Otherwise, there would be no way to read the room if you’re not in the room.”

Range is now a key part of the Informed K12s approach to teamwork, from their daily standup to a way to say “how’s it going each day.”

“Without Range, as a manager I would have a lot more work to do. What Range deals with is really important day-to-day stuff for engineering managers. These activities really need to happen to make a team healthy.”

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