

Building a team, block by block



Having one-on-one meetings with your employees gives you the chance to hear about their accomplishments, priorities and challenges, so you can provide the insight, solutions and encouragement they need to succeed.

But finding the time to meet with your employees individually and consistently is no small feat, particularly in fast-paced, demanding office environments. Yet, carving out standing meeting times with every employee you lead may be the secret to building a dream team. Here's why.

Standing appointments empower your employees. In a podcast on the value of a one-on-one meeting, management consultant Mark Horstman suggests that your calendar allow for at least a half hour meeting a week with each of your employees.

This is where you let them take on the role of leader. Task them with the responsibility of creating the agenda, reserving and selecting the meeting venue, researching and preparing supporting materials needed for the meeting—and to do most of the talking. If they don't need more than five minutes of your time on some weeks, empower them to adjust the meeting time appropriately, without explanation. If they wish to cancel because they have no "pressing business," allow them that freedom as well.

Most important, demonstrate your commitment to them as a manager with your actions. Allocate the time in your schedule to truly hear them, and support their work—and never cancel the one-on-one.

Regardless of how busy your schedule, you are a manager; your priority is to act in that capacity.

Minutes cost far less than hours. Employees need your direction and insight in order to productively and appropriately determine where their attention is most beneficial, both on a task-related basis, and in regards to larger company initiatives.

Without your consistent guidance, they'll make judgment calls about what activities are indeed priority, how information is to be analyzed, organized and presented, and with whom it will be shared. The problem with that approach? They may make the wrong decision, simply because they weren't able to present their proposed approach to you first. As a result, their time is made unproductive, and you'll be forced to invest your time into helping them amend their error.

When employees have standing "face time" with you, conversations may reveal answers to topics and questions that appear small on the surface—but carry much greater significance in the broader sense of your team's collective, and individual performance.

They'll reach out to you in less efficient ways. Cancelling a one-on-one meeting with employees when your schedule is packed may seem like the simplest way to gain time in your schedule, but it doesn't negate their needs for answers and resolution.

In lieu of a one-on-one, employees will reach out to you in far less efficient ways, including email, phone, "drive by" chats and text messages.

All of these modes of communication introduce opportunities for miscommunication, and the need for multiple exchanges to arrive at a suitable resolution.

Your inattention can drive them out the door. One of the most important contributions you can make to employee retention, satisfaction and engagement is to simply be present for your employees.

In an article for *McKinsey Quarterly*, consultant Sabine Cosack reports that "praise from one's manager, attention from leaders, frequent promotions, opportunities to lead projects, and chances to join fast-track management programs are often more effective than cash" when it comes to retaining employees.

In fact, in its survey of executives, managers and employees, all rated those five nonfinancial incentives among the most effective ways to motivate and retain employees. Employees want to be heard, acknowledged and respected—especially the ones that you can't afford to lose. Standing one-on-one meetings are the perfect venue to deliver on all those needs.