

The art of the employee one-on-one



Employee one-on-ones are critical meetings leaders can leverage to understand employee interests, strengths and weaknesses; to build a sense of mutual trust and respect; and provide the support employees need to feel engaged, accountable, productive, and successful.

But like most meetings, there are some basic guidelines you and your employees should know and adhere to, to ensure that the time you spend is productive.

Here are some simple tips to maximize the value of your one-on-one meetings.

✓ **Establish a recurring time for the meeting.**

An employee's role, experience level, and the amount of team meetings your group holds will dictate how frequently you should have one-on-one meetings; but career coach and author Elizabeth Grace Saunders recommends holding the meeting at the same time and same place once you find the right cadence for each employee.

When you establish a dedicated time for one-on-ones, you'll reduce the likelihood of scheduling conflicts and can minimize the amount of one-off interruptions you receive from your team throughout the week.

As a result, you and your employees may become more productive.

✓ **Collaborate on a loose agenda.**

Successful one-on-ones give the employee a chance to discuss pressing issues (as he or she perceives them), while providing the manager with an opportunity to understand the employee's current workload, bandwidth and areas of strength or challenge.

Ask your employee to create and provide a bulleted list of the topics he or she would like to cover in your meeting at least 24 hours in advance of it; review the list and add the topics you'd like to cover as well. Send the compiled document back to your employee before the meeting so you both know what will be discussed.

Rather than a project list to review, consider the list as talking points that will facilitate deeper conversation.

Ideally, your employee should feel empowered to decide how much time he or she wishes to spend addressing the various points of discussion; the manager's primary role is to actively listen, and provide guidance as needed.

✓ **Stick to the schedule.**

Start your one-on-one meeting on time, and end it as scheduled.

The more you and your employee are familiar with exactly how much time there is to discuss various issues, the more productive your one-on-one conversations will become.

If you can't make it through the list each week, consider scheduling additional one-on-ones, or allocating more time so that the employee has the support he or she needs.

Can't think of specific items you want to cover in the meeting? Consider questions like:

- What frustrated you the most this week?
- What was the most interesting thing you worked on last week?
- What motivates you the most?

✓ **Remove distractions.**

You wouldn't glance at your incoming email or text messages if you were meeting with the CEO of your company; don't do it during one-on-one time.

Part of what makes the manager-employee meeting so important is simply that it communicates you care.

Conversely, you inherently tell the employee he is not your priority if you cancel one-on-ones because your day becomes too busy, or you're distracted during the conversation.

✓ **Consider it an opportunity to understand your employee.**

Successful leadership isn't limited to making sure that your team members understand how to do their jobs; it requires that you understand what inspires them, what challenges them, where they hope to be in their career years from now and who they are outside of work.

A simple question like "How has your week been outside of work?" respects professional boundaries, but helps you form a connection with employees that leads to trust, empathy and mutual respect.

When you understand your employees beyond their job responsibilities you're better equipped to help them develop as individuals, and a collaborative, high-performing team.