

TIPS FOR 1:1 MEETINGS



If strong leadership is based on open and frequent communication, one-on-one meetings can be one of the most powerful tools managers have. Unfortunately, many leaders don't correctly utilize one-on-one meetings, often known as 1:1s, wasting valuable potential to connect individually with direct reports. Frequent cancellations, lack of structure, and a focus solely on status updates are common mistakes that managers make during 1:1 meetings. If you're not getting value and action from your 1:1 meetings (you'll know if you aren't), the difference is usually in your fundamentals.

One-on-one meetings do require a bit of preparation, but once you and your employees understand the structure and the expectations, just a few minutes of prep is all you'll need to make these meetings valuable. In this article, we will:

- Define the purpose of 1:1 meetings
- Share the benefits
- Provide simple best practices
- Include [additional resources](#) to streamline your changes

(This tutorial is part of our [IT Leadership & Best Practices Guide](#). Use the right-hand menu to navigate.)

The basics of a one-on-one meeting

A one-on-one meeting is a private conversation between an employee and their manager or team lead. The meeting should take place regularly, typically weekly or biweekly—schedule them in advance and on a recurring basis. In a traditional office setting, 1:1 meetings should occur face-to-face, in an office or small conference room that affords privacy. In more open office settings, you can

meet on a set of couches, but make sure it's far enough away from your team or other employees that eavesdropping isn't easy. If your employees are remote, set up phone calls or video chats.

So, what's the purpose of a 1:1 meeting? One-on-ones are crucial in all companies as they are designed to check-in with employees about day-to-day basics, responsibilities, questions, long-term goals, and general job satisfaction. (That might sound like a lot, but we'll help make it easy.) The 1:1 is the best way for managers and those who report to them to develop a strong relationship, connect on pressing issues, and ensure that employees feel like they're working toward their goals.

These are not the same as evaluations, which are more structured and provide a formal performance assessment.

Benefits of 1:1 meetings

Managers and employees alike may dread 1:1 meetings. Employees may be annoyed that the manager is ill-prepared or cancelled the meeting several times, or they may fear the manager will be overly critical. Managers may feel awkward, unsure of what to talk about or how to “check in” without micromanaging. But the positives of one-on-one meetings far outweigh these feelings. Once you establish a routine and structure for your 1:1s, both parties can feel satisfied and valued.

Common benefits of 1:1 meetings include:

- **Better employee engagement.** The manager shows that each employee is worth some of the manager's time; in return, employees will come to meetings better prepared.
- **Increased productivity.** Talking about challenges, upcoming projects, or long-term goals can help refocus each employee.
- **Reduced turnover.** When employees know they have a safe space to ask questions and seek feedback, they can be more satisfied with their job, reducing their likelihood of leaving the company.
- **Proactive problem management.** Direct reports will feel more comfortable asking questions or sharing their challenges, and the manager can offer regular feedback on projects. This helps catch small issues, whether work or personnel related, before they snowball into large problems.
- **Real-time, two-way feedback.** One-on-one meetings should be more conversational, less dictatorial. Managers can give quick feedback and celebrate employee wins, and the employee should feel comfortable to do the same.
- **Improved performance.** This is a culmination of all the other benefits: both employees and managers will work more productively and successfully—which results in improved performance evaluations for both of you.

Best practices for 1:1 meetings

A variety of [best practices](#) and [leadership tactics](#) can improve your 1:1 meetings. Let's start with the fundamentals—master these practices and your 1:1 meetings will benefit both you as the manager and your direct reports.

Stay consistent

Successful 1:1 meetings are consistent ones. Meetings should have a regular cadence, whether

weekly or biweekly, and be treated with top priority. Canceling 1:1 meetings should only occur in pressing circumstances; frequent cancellations or rescheduling result in [employees feeling unworthy of their manager's time](#). This consistency applies to the meeting structure, too, so both you and your employee know what to expect from week to week. This consistency is particularly vital when your workers are remote.

Prepare

A prepared agenda is crucial for efficient, successful meetings. Both you and your direct reports should come prepared to share status, ask and answer questions, etc. You certainly can share your agenda ahead of time, though simply bringing it to the meeting is useful, too. The better prepared you are as manager, the better prepared your employees will learn to be. Eventually, your employees may start dictating the meeting's agenda.

Maintain privacy

Although 1:1s won't always involve confidential information, ensuring privacy lets employees get comfortable and build trust. That privacy is essential when it's time to talk about feedback or long-term career moves. Seek a private office or conference space for face-to-face meetings and close the door to your home office when meeting remotely.

Minimize distractions

Conducting your meeting in privacy and with minimal to no distractions shows that you value what your employees have to say—that nothing is more important.

- For in-person meetings, turn off your computer and phone to avoid notifications, and use pen and paper to keep any notes.
- For remote/virtual 1:1s, use a quiet place with stable internet access, limiting noise (like coffee shops) and wearing headsets if that improves the connection. Use pen and paper to keep notes to avoid interruptions.

Have a conversation

Unlike a team or department meeting where one person is conveying information to a group of workers, a 1:1 is a conversation. Though you're the manager, you should not talk the entire time. Do equal parts talking and listening, and let the employee steer the conversation. Some weeks, your employee may talk more than you do—and that's good!

Take notes

The act of taking notes is vital to 1:1 meetings, signaling that you're serious, you're listening, and you'll follow up. Try using pen and paper for your note taking. Studies show that [taking notes more slowly is precisely what makes them useful](#). If you do need your laptop or device, use it solely for notes.

Create tasks & follow up

End each 1:1 meeting with five minutes dedicated to creating an action plan. Realistically, both the manager and the employee will have tasks—following up with colleagues, clients, or each other; tracking down an answer to a question; trying a new sales or work technique. When creating your action plan, agree to a timeline for each task. You may be able to handle for the next 1:1, though some may take only a day and others a week or longer. After the meeting, the manager can summarize these next steps by email.

Creating a few key habits in your one-on-one meetings will get you big wins. With the right topics and strong fundamentals, your 1:1s will quickly go from time wasted to time well spent.

Additional resources

Review these [supervisor FAQs and best practices](#) about 1:1 meetings.

Get inspiration or build your ideal 1:1 agenda with these free templates:

- [DIY questions and best practices checklist](#)
- [Microsoft Word template](#)
- [Asana template](#)
- [Project management template](#)

Managers will benefit from this slideshow:

[The One on One Meeting Agenda](#) from [ManagerFoundation](#)

Share this related slideshow with your direct reports, so you're all starting with the same expectations:

[What You Need to prepare for One on One Meetings With Your Boss](#) from [ManagerFoundation](#)