



BEST PRACTICES FOR OPTIMIZING ONE-ON-ONES

OVERVIEW

One-on-one conversations (1:1s) are an opportunity to strengthen the manager-employee relationship and to elevate the mindset and performance of your team. Often, leaders make the mistake of thinking that fly-by conversations are sufficient to get an employee to move from average to high-performing. Contrary to that practice, intentional, well-planned one-on-one conversations create forward movement.

An employee regularly goes through ups and downs that can influence their mindset and performance. These feelings can be triggered by an experience (something happens) or a choice (the person simply chooses to think or operate a different way). By conducting consistent, weekly 1:1s with an employee, you can coach, lead, and guide to effectively support the employee's growth, development, and performance.

When having these development conversations, the focus should be on three growth areas: **Mindset**, **Performance**, and **Career Path**.

The following is a framework, centered around these three areas, that will help you plan for and guide your 1:1s with your team members.

MINDSET

Managing various components of an individual's mindset includes the current state of the employee (how they are feeling mentally and emotionally), how her/his relationships – specifically in the workplace – are working for or against them, and the triumphs and/or challenges she/he is experiencing (both personally and professionally, with an emphasis on happenings in the workplace).

As a manager, you can work through these mindset components as follows:

- **Understand what drives them:** A self-aware employee will have a full understanding of what motivates and drives them (ex. Recognition, money, connection, variety, certainty, etc.). Leverage diagnostics and assessments to more scientifically uncover what motivates employees.
- **Encourage candid conversations:** Empower employees to speak openly, honestly, and respectfully about the challenges they may be having. It's important as a manager to also lead by example so that employees understand how to methodically navigate potentially tough conversations. Help propose solutions, then follow-up on actions and activities (when applicable) to foster accountability.



PROMPTS AND/OR QUESTIONS TO HELP GUIDE THE CONVERSATION

- **How are you feeling about ?**

Be specific here. Ask about a specific task or project, a goal or metric they've been addressing, or an area or topic they have mentioned has been a challenge. If you want to take a more general approach by asking simply, "How are you feeling?" be prepared to thoughtfully navigate the conversation and hone in on specific areas that have been previously discussed.

- **How is impacting your work? How is it impacting you outside of work?**

This question will likely be asked as a continuation of the conversation that unfolds after asking the question above.

- **How can I help think through and/or address any challenges you're facing?**

- **What have been your bright spots since we last spoke?**

PERFORMANCE

Managing performance ensures using and referencing an employee's tangible goals and performance metrics. Ensure she/he is clear on role expectations and that you both are aligned on responsibilities and actions. Hold the employee accountable for her/his actions and discuss how the employee will do the same.

As a manager, you can work through these performance components as follows:

- **Align on leading indicators:** Be explicit about the activities that will drive consistent and high performance. If a manager spends excessive time focusing only on lagging indicators, the employee will likely lack a full and comprehensive understanding of the behaviors and actions that will lead to the expected standards of performance. This often results in inconsistent or sub-par performance.
- **Share accountability:** Ensure you are clear on what you can count on the employee for and share your expectations with her/him. Together, align on the methods you'll use to determine the timeline for getting things done, track progress and success, and address the wins and losses. As the manager, help drive your employees' success by offering guidance and support, helping to eliminate barriers, and offering constructive and timely feedback.
- **Have proactive conversations:** Stay connected to your employees' progress overtime. Anticipate (and help them anticipate) roadblocks that may inhibit their success and initiate conversations to help them get ahead of potential risks so that they achieve desired results.



PROMPTS AND/OR QUESTIONS TO HELP GUIDE THE CONVERSATION

Reaffirm:

- **What are your top priorities for the quarter?**

Review:

- **What percentage of your time was spent on those priorities this past week? What progress has been made?**
- **What (if anything) is inhibiting your progress?**
- **What results are you seeing from focusing on [insert excellence indicator]?**
- **What do you need to make for and how will you ensure this happens?**
- **What would better look like?**
- **What support do you need from me or the team?**
- **What change do you need to make?**
- **What will you need to do more/less of or differently to see that change through?**

Recommit:

- **Where will you focus your time and energy to achieve desired results? How will you**
- **know your efforts were effective?**
- **What actions, behaviors, or scenarios must you avoid to achieve desired results?**

CAREER PATH

Managing an employee's career path requires setting a very clear path forward and providing intentional and persistent guidance on that path. Professional growth is dependent upon the access individuals have to effective leadership, coaching, training, development, and resources related to job success.

As a manager, you can work through these career path components as follows:

- **Understand their aspirations:** A self-aware employee has already considered their career trajectory within the organization. Help them understand their growth opportunities, ask where they see themselves in one year, five years, 10 years, and leverage their aspirations for future conversations around performance and mobility.
- **Meet them where they are:** Understand where your employee is and where they are going. Intentionally focusing on – and fostering – their growth and progress increases engagement, performance, and results. Continually align on career advancing goals and what is required to get there.
- **Foster ongoing growth:** Defining and guiding an individual's career path does not always mean changes in title and/or compensation increases. It can often mean taking on more responsibility, learning new or further developing skills, and working with different groups of people. In other words, it's important to encourage behaviors and actions that will lead to the upward trajectory for which the employee is aiming. Foster the necessary training and development that will prepare the employee for what might be next.



PROMPTS AND/OR QUESTIONS TO HELP GUIDE THE CONVERSATION

Understand their career goals:

- **Where do you feel you are presently in your career? How do you see your role evolving overtime?**
- **Where would you like to be one year/five years/10 years from now; what are your career goals (in the short- and long-term)?**
- **What are you already doing to reach those short- and long-term goals? What are your most valuable talents and skills?**
- **Which development activity can you start now that will be most beneficial to achieving your short-term goals? Your long-term goals?**

Help them understand the organization's goals and vision:

- **What are the organization's goals for the year?**
- **How do your career goals fit into or align with the organization's goals?**
- **What projects, committees, or other responsibilities would you like to be a part of to help develop your career?**
- **Is there another department or role you'd like to learn more about? How can I help you get started?**

MECHANICS OF A ONE-ON-ONE

The framework above will help you lead intentional, focused, and effective 1:1s that will make your employees feel valued and supported.

This final section is intended to briefly outline the mechanics of a standard 1:1 meeting. 1:1s should:

- **Take about 30-45 minutes.**
- **Be the same time each week they're held with a standing agenda.** It's important that as a manager or participant you arrive on-time for the meeting.
- **Be conducted on a bi-weekly basis (weekly, where needed) and not moved unless there is an emergency.** Consistency demonstrates your commitment to the success of your employees. If a 1:1 must be missed, the meeting should be promptly rescheduled.
- **Be owned and led by the employee, not the manager.** Because these conversations are focused on the employee's performance and growth, she should lead the 1:1 discussion, not the manager.