

How to have a 1-on-1 meeting

Background

Old school leadership and management is built on the 'boss' and 'worker' mentality. This old school framework creates silo's and a divide between artificial layers within a team. In the old school model, there was little focus on trust and relationship.

The modern framework recognises that for a team to really thrive, trust is key. When everyone in the team feels valued and important, they engage more fully. Each individual has goals, concerns, unique perspectives and insights. Modern leadership seeks to harness those human elements to build peak performance within a team.

Informal 1-on-1 meetings/coaching sessions are the critical building blocks that create the space to build trust and relationship. From there, true communication can evolve. Once you have gained mutual trust, you will both feel safe to say what is really on your mind. You will be able to align behind a common goal to look for solutions to problems, to be creative and help each other to build a better team.

Where there is trust and respect within a team, the ground is laid for synergistic results. Where $1 + 1 = 3, 4, 5, 6 \dots$

Purpose & intent of a 1-on-1 meeting

There are really 3 goals of having 1-on-1 meetings with your team

1. *Build trust and relationship:*
 - a. show you care,
 - b. take an interest in what is going on for the other person,
 - c. listen with empathy.
 - d. Understand what is important to them
 - e. Understand their concerns.
2. *Help them to solve problems:*
 - a. Coaching - the art of helping someone see options they were previously blind too.
Asking good questions.
 - b. Be a sounding board and brainstorming partner.
 - c. **Not** to provide all the answers – but *maybe* some answers
3. *Personal and professional development* – building on the back of point #2, in a 1-on-1 meeting, you have the chance to help someone to become better – and to find better ways of working.

The Method – How do you run the meeting?

Positioning the 1-on-1's

If you have never done a 1-on-1 meeting, you may broach the subject with something like this "John, I'd like to invest some time with you to give us the chance to talk 1-on-1. I'd like the opportunity to check in with you every so often. Can we set a time for".

Who do you need to be?

You want your 1-on1 meetings to be like you are chatting to a friend. They are designed to be an open conversation where anything can be discussed.

Some important points for you to consider going into the meeting:

- Be open and unattached to the outcome. There is no 'right' way to do this.
- Be yourself. The more relaxed you are, the more relaxed the other person will be.
- Be genuinely curious. Remind yourself that this is another human being sitting with you, who like you, has goals, concerns, insights. All of which, when understood, can help build a better team and workplace.
- You don't need to have all the answers. In fact, sometimes the less answers you have the better. Find the answers together.
- Have fun. When people are having fun, they are more creative. Perhaps there might be topics that come up that are not fun ... and that's OK. Just remember to not take yourself too seriously.

Starting the conversation

There should be no expectations of what should come up and how it should be dealt with. It is an open forum. That said, you will need to guide the conversation and you do so with open questions.

Perhaps you might start with something like – “Hey Sue, thanks for joining me. It's important to me that I give you the time and space to have a chat about how things are going for you. It can be hard to do so in the middle of the hustle and bustle. Sitting down here gives us a few minutes without being interrupted.”

Make people feel safe. You might take any pressure off with some statements like:

- “there are no expectations on how this needs to go, so feel free to say as little or as much as you feel comfortable”
- “To be honest, this is a pretty unnatural thing for me to do so forgive me if I fumble a bit. I'm sure we'll find our way as we get a few of these under our belt”
- Just be honest and say what is true for you.

Then you might get the ball rolling with something very simple like:

- So, what's on your mind? or
- How are things going for you at work?
 - What are you enjoying/excited about?
 - What are you enjoying less/not excited about?
 - How do you find working with your peers?
- Tell me about your goals at work? Where would you like to grow this year?
- If you feel comfortable, tell me about any personal goals you have?
- What opportunities do you see in your role/department/the company, that we might not be aware of?
- If there is a particular recent work event (big project, announcement, new hire etc) they were involved in, ask them about how it was/is for them.

Dealing with problems

It's important you are willing to hear everything. Be willing to ask this question too.

- Where are the biggest frustrations for you in your work?

Whether you ask this question or not, the frustrations are still there, so you may as well know about them. And you don't need to be able to fix them immediately or ever. But once you know about them, you can determine if they are something that requires more time invested to learn more/find solutions)

- if something comes up that you don't know how to fix you can follow up with something like "wow that sounds like it's pretty frustrating for you" (always empathise vs. be defensive on why it has to be that way) then
- "thanks for sharing that with me. I don't see an easy fix right now but perhaps now that we both know about it, we can be on the lookout for a better solution" or
- "What options do you see that could make this better?" and "Tell me more about how do you see that working?"
- If you can see an obvious reason why it won't work you might add – "to give you more context [fill in the information you don't know]" then "given that information, do you see a way to still make your solution work or is there another way to look at this?"

Winding up

This conversation should be under 10 minutes. If a topic comes up that requires more time, book a time outside of this meeting to dive deeper. If these meetings take too long, no one looks forward to them.

These sessions will build on each other. Never judge the success or failure of an individual meeting. Remember, your goal is to build relationship and trust first, that will lead to open and honest communication which will grease the wheels of teamwork and productivity. A health team culture (people feeling valued and aligned in values) is a force to be reckoned with.

You might finish the conversation with something like "Paul, I'll let you get back to it. I really enjoyed the chance to hear what's on your mind and what's important to you. I hope it was helpful for you. I'd like to make sure we do this regularly enough so let's sit down again in X days/weeks/months. Is that OK with you?"

"And it goes without saying that if there is something on your mind, you can come to me at anytime, no need to wait for one of these meetings OK". "Thanks again".