



## Conducting Effective Employee One-on-Ones

There are a number of ways managers can ensure they are doing everything possible to keep their employees and colleagues happy and therefore productive. Many times this only requires a good discussion and reassessment of goals. Each week you should devote a half hour to an hour of your time to these meetings (which is basically 1% of your work week, and 1% of your year!).

One-on-ones are a great management tool and not only help you establish what kind of managing director you need to be, but also open the lines of communication with your team. The one-on-ones are meant to be an opportunity for open communication where goals, complaints, and praises are heard and resolved. This is the time to learn about the needs of the employees and the organization.

There are many things to pay attention to in these meetings and below is a list of considerations to help you make them more effective:

- **Be clear about what will happen.** Tell your employee what you will be talking about in one-on-ones (performance, answering questions, providing feedback, praising work, discussing rewards, assigning work, talking about opportunities, etc).
- **Don't cancel.** The easiest way to communicate to an employee that they are not important is to cancel their one-on-one, no matter what the reason. If a conflict comes up try to reschedule the one-on-one to another time on the same day, and apologize for doing so. Canceling is worse than never scheduling a one-on-one at all.
- **Let them drive.** Don't start a one-on-one by piling more work on employees. Encourage them to drive the agenda and bring a list of things they would like to discuss. You can try to bring these out by simply asking, "What can I help you with?"
- **Be transparent and honest.** By encouraging your employees and colleagues to raise real concerns you're going to get some tough questions. If you can't answer them, tell them that. If you do choose to answer, answer honestly and err on the side of transparency. If they point out a problem on the team, acknowledge it and respond by telling them what you plan to do to address it. Better yet, ask them for their solution.
- **Discuss career development.** Occasionally make sure to step away from project discussions and have a higher-level discussion about the employee's career and satisfaction on the team. These are sometimes called "stay interviews." Check in on what the employee's specific goals

are and what they think will make them satisfied in their job in the coming months. If their goal is to be promoted, review what they need to achieve in order to make that happen.

- **Go fishing.** Ask open-ended questions to discover concerns. They can be questions about a specific project ("How's project X going?") or more broad questions about the office. You won't always get answers, but occasionally ask employees:
  - What is something that would help you do your job better?
  - What can I do to help you achieve your goals in the company?
  - What could I be doing better as a manager?
  - Who do you admire in this office?
  - Who do you talk to when you have questions about work?
  - What's the biggest opportunity that we are missing out on?
  - What are we not doing that we should be doing?
  - Are you excited about your job right now?
- **Ask for course correction.** You can get some really great guidance by asking questions and listening to the answers. It's much better to get this feedback throughout the year and act on it than be surprised on it at review time when you hear about it from your own boss.
- **Give course correction.** Performance issues grow over time. Try to spot patterns early and give gentle feedback to reverse performance issues and consider conducting a Performance Improvement Plan. Strengthen the tone of your feedback the longer the performance issue persists.
- **Coach them on communication.** The one skill that can benefit any employee throughout their career is clear communication. Use one-on-ones as opportunities to coach your employees on communication. If employees are unclear explaining something, probe until you understand and then replay the point back to them, as an example.
- **Dangle opportunities.** Try to come up with a couple personalized ideas for how the employee could really distinguish him or herself. Don't assign these as goals or projects, but mention them as opportunities. See which employees take the bait and go over and above to capitalize on the opportunity, or come up with others on their own. These are the employees that are striving, a key quality in any employee.
- **Be a good listener.** Good listening skills are the most important foundations in a relationship. Listening in a one-on-one means you are listening to your employees needs and hearing from them things that could be improved upon.
- **Not optional.** Take the time every week to check in with employees. Make one-on-ones a priority and you will see the benefits.