

ONE-ON-ONE BLUEPRINT



The Ultimate One-on-One Meeting Blueprint

Many leaders associate the term "employee meeting" only with the annual one-on-one conversation: the performance review.

But that's not enough. What really makes a difference are regular one-on-one meetings with employees.

These meetings are about building trust, exchanging information, providing guidance, making important decisions – and often also about personal matters.

In a one-on-one, you talk to your employee about what's important, but not necessarily urgent. **It's not about status updates.**



A) Feeling Insecure at the Start? That's Totally Normal!

Many leaders feel uncertain when they first start doing one-on-ones:

? "What will my employee think if I suddenly introduce these meetings?"

Here's what matters: This uncertainty is normal – sit with it. It's absolutely worth it in the long run.

If one-on-ones are new, explain to your team why you're introducing them. That helps reduce uncertainty and shows appreciation.

Example of how to introduce it:

? *"John, as I mentioned, I'd like to start having regular one-on-one meetings with each of my team members. This is really important to me.*

My goal is to improve our communication and make sure I take time for each individual – so I can support you better.

Honestly, this still feels a bit unfamiliar to me too – but I believe it's important to start.

So let me ask: Is there anything I can support you with at the moment?"

Why this works:

- ✓ It encourages employees to open up more
- ✓ It shows that you're intentionally investing in the relationship
- ✓ It prevents scepticism ("Why does my boss want to talk to me?")

B) How to Run an Effective One-on-One Meeting

Every one-on-one meeting can unfold differently, but having a basic framework helps create structure and ensures that all important topics are addressed.

Especially when you're just starting out with these meetings, the following 30-minute format can serve as a helpful guide:

Example of a one-on-one in 3 x 10-minute segments:

First 10 minutes: Employee time

Focus: The employee sets the agenda.

- ✓ The employee gets space to share their concerns, challenges, or successes.
- ✓ The manager listens actively, asks questions, and gives minimal input.
- ✓ The goal is to catch issues early and foster an open communication environment.

Example questions:

- ? *"Is there anything that's currently on your mind?"*
- ? *"What successes or challenges have you experienced recently?"*
- ? *"Which task do you currently enjoy the least – and why?"*
- ? *"Which past project or task did you enjoy the most – and why?"*

Second 10 minutes: Manager input

Focus: The manager brings up relevant topics.

- ✓ Ask the employee for their opinion or assessment.
- ✓ Opportunity to give feedback – both positive and constructive.
- ✓ Brief updates on goals, developments, or organizational changes.

Example Topics:

- Feedback: *"I've noticed you've been very active in offering suggestions during recent meetings – that really helped move the team forward!"*
- Company developments: *"Our team is going to grow, so we'll be introducing some new processes. What's your take on that?"*
- Organizational topics: *"We're planning to slightly adjust the shift schedule – how do you think that will affect your work?"*
- Team dynamics: *"Is there anything about the team I should know to better lead and support everyone?"*

Final 10 minutes: Looking ahead & action items

Focus: What's coming up next?

- ✓ A shared look at the coming days or weeks.
- ✓ Clarify any open questions and prioritize key tasks.
- ✓ Summarize the discussed action items.

Example questions:

- ? *"What are your top priorities for the upcoming week?"*
- ? *"Is there anything we should clarify before our next meeting?"*
- ? *"What kind of support do you need to accomplish your tasks effectively?"*

To wrap up:

- Summarize key action points: *"So today we agreed that you'll prepare the presentation by Wednesday, and I'll take care of getting the budget approval."*

C) Finding the Right Length

Many managers ask themselves: *How long should a one-on-one meeting last?*

Important: These meetings don't always need to take 30 minutes. The duration should be flexible and based on the actual need for conversation.

✓ **Start small:** 15 to 20 minutes may be completely sufficient in the beginning.

✓ **Flexible time allocation:** If the employee has a lot to talk about, use the entire time for that – the structure is just a guideline.

✓ **Consistency matters more than length:** Hold one-on-ones at least once a month. Bi-weekly is my recommendation, though.

Example of flexible planning:

- **Few topics?** Keep it short – don't force a conversation if there's nothing pressing.
- **Many topics?** Invest more time to truly address your employee's concerns.

Common mistake: Scheduling meetings that are too long or too infrequent.
→ Better to have shorter, regular conversations than long, irregular ones!

Tip: Adjust the frequency if you notice the meetings are becoming too much for your employees. **Every 4 to 6 weeks** is perfectly fine, too.

D) How Do I Start a One-on-One Meeting?

A good start is crucial to create an open and productive atmosphere. Here are a few simple ways to make the beginning easier:

1. Start with an open-ended question

An open question encourages the employee to speak freely. It shows interest and appreciation.

Example questions:

- ? *"How are you doing right now?"*
- ? *"What's currently going well in your area?"*
- ? *"What could be going better in your area?"*
- ? *"What's your biggest challenge at the moment?"*
- ? *"Is there anything I can support you with right now?"*

Why does this work?

- ✓ Open-ended questions let the employee set the focus.
- ✓ They help break the ice and avoid a stiff or forced start.
- ✓ They give you insight into the employee's current mood and challenges.

2. If the employee doesn't open up: Ask about recent developments

Sometimes it's hard for employees to dive right into the conversation. If they give short answers at first, shift the focus to current developments within the company.

Example questions:

- ? *"How are you experiencing the new organizational structure?"*
- ? *"What impact has the Oracle CRM rollout had on your work?"*
- ? *"How is the collaboration with Team X going at the moment?"*

Why does this work?

- ✓ It shows that you're genuinely interested in their opinion.
- ✓ It gives the employee a chance to share feedback.
- ✓ These types of questions provide concrete starting points for a meaningful conversation.

3. Listening & Asking Questions – Your Most Important Task

Once the conversation gets going, your role as a manager becomes clear:

Listen actively and follow up.

Active listening means you truly want to understand: your employee, their perspective, their challenges, and their problems.

Ask questions – but always keep in mind:

You're offering your employee a space to connect with you. Yes, they want your opinion too, but more importantly, they want to be heard.

Tips for effective listening:

- ✓ Let the employee finish speaking without interrupting.
 - ✓ Show interest by nodding or with short affirmations ("I see...", "Interesting...").
 - ✓ Pick up on what the employee says and dig deeper: "You just mentioned that XYZ was difficult – could you tell me more about that?"
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- ✓ Talking about company developments or changes can be a great icebreaker.
 - ✓ Listening and asking follow-up questions fosters a respectful atmosphere and leads to deeper insights.

4. Special Case: You're the Successor

If you've taken over the team from a previous manager, one-on-ones are a great opportunity to learn more about your team's expectations, preferences, and past experiences.

Through targeted questions, you can gain valuable insights into what matters most to your employees.

Important: These questions are especially useful for your very first one-on-ones with your team members.

Example questions:

- ? *"What worked well with your previous manager?"*
- ? *"What do you wish had been different with your previous manager?"*
- ? *"How do you envision our collaboration going forward?"*

Why does this work?

- ✓ Clarifies expectations and wishes
- ✓ Lays the foundation for effective collaboration
- ✓ Reveals what the employee valued and appreciated in the past
- ✓ Helps uncover positive aspects of the previous working relationship

E) Three Key Tips for Successful One-on-One Meetings

To make your one-on-one meetings truly effective and avoid common pitfalls, be sure to follow these three core principles:

1. One-on-ones are private, one-on-one conversations

Important: These meetings should take place in a calm and relaxed environment where uninterrupted communication is possible.

- ✓ Avoid loud or busy locations where distractions might occur.
- ✓ The meeting doesn't have to happen in the office — a walk or a relaxed conversation over lunch can be just as effective.
- ✓ A personal setting encourages open and honest communication.

Example:

- *"Let's do our one-on-one outside today while walking — fresh air helps us gain new perspectives."*

Common mistake: Trying to squeeze the meeting in between other tasks or holding it in a chaotic environment, which leads to a shallow conversation.

2. Full focus on the employee

Important: A one-on-one is a dedicated moment where the employee is the center of attention.

- ✓ Be present and give your full attention to the employee.
- ✓ Turn off your phone or keep it out of sight to avoid distractions.
- ✓ Make sure there are no interruptions from emails, phone calls, or colleagues.

Example:

- **Wrong:** *"Yeah, mhm... just a second, I just need to quickly reply to this message..."*
- **Right:** *"I've set aside this time just for you, so let's take it to talk about what's on your mind without interruptions."*

Common mistake: Checking emails or typing on your laptop during the meeting – this signals disinterest and undermines the impact of the conversation.

3. A one-on-one is an employee conversation – not a "boss talk"

Important: The employee should do more of the talking than the manager.

- ✓ Your main goal is to listen, ask questions, and create space for topics that matter to the employee.
- ✓ See yourself not as a speaker, but as a facilitator who gently steers the conversation.
- ✓ If needed, remind yourself: If you're talking 70% of the time, the meeting isn't going well.

Common mistake: The manager dominates the conversation, mainly talking about company goals, new projects, or personal ideas – without actively involving the employee.

E) Follow-Ups

Many managers think that by the second or third meeting, there won't be anything left to talk about.

With the following tip, that won't be a problem:

- ✓ Schedule the next meeting right at the end of the current one.
- ✓ Send a summary of the conversation, including agreed action items, to the employee.

Important: Take notes during the conversation. These notes will help you ask follow-up questions in the next meeting.

Example:

- *"Last time, we talked about your workload. We decided that you should focus only on the urgent project for now and put all other tasks on hold.
How has that impacted your workload? Has it improved, or is there still something I can do to support you?"*

We wish you lots of success for your first one-on-one meetings!

Ready to become the leader your team and superiors need?



One-on-one meetings are a powerful tool — but there's more!

If you want to lead with confidence, clarity, and impact, I highly recommend our compact online video training: **Leadership Crash Course**

From feeling overwhelmed to becoming a confident & respected leader who gets results – in just 30 days:

- ✓ Say good bye to “impostor syndrome”
- ✓ Designed especially for new and frustrated leaders
- ✓ Learn how to build a high-performing team that takes ownership
- ✓ Hands-on, easy to understand, and immediately applicable to make progress quickly, even if you're busy or overwhelmed.
- ✓ Gain ready-to-use tools and strategies that save time, reduce stress, and help you act with confidence in real-world situations.

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<https://www.berndgeropp.com/leadership-crash-course/>