

How to run epic 1:1 meetings

The step-by-step guide





IN THIS GUIDE

Why do 1:1 performance meetings matter?

If you want to improve performance, you need to do regular 1:1 meetings.

You can use them for:

- ✎ Giving people positive and constructive feedback
- ✎ Supporting your team to achieve their career goals
- ✎ Making sure the right work is being delivered

And you'll build a culture where employees feel more engaged, valued and committed to the work.

Here is a step-by-step guide to running effective 1:1s.

Buckle up.

STEP #1

The purpose, agenda & schedule

The purpose of 1:1s

Picture this:

Your boss emails you, saying, 'We need to talk.'

Hello, nervous system! What's your immediate reaction? Maybe concern? Confusion? Or maybe you wonder whether your job's on the line.

It's not cool, is it. If you're a boss—don't be that guy. Be clear and consistent.

Set clear expectations about the structure and schedule for 1:1 performance meetings. It helps your team members to know what to expect.

When your people are used to having a regular time locked in to chat about their performance, it normalises these kinds of conversations. Employees also want regular opportunities to discuss their goals, get feedback, and explore growth opportunities. Without these meetings, they can feel isolated and confused about the priorities.

Remember, once you've agreed on the frequency, stick to it. Team members who have their 1:1 meetings cancelled or rescheduled regularly can start to feel devalued.

The agenda & schedule

We recommend booking a recurring 30-minute fortnightly 1:1 meeting (at a minimum) with each of your direct reports.

This is based on Marcus Buckingham's research, which found that "checking in with your employees once a week, to once every two weeks, had an immediate increase in engagement and performance, but checking in monthly or less saw a decrease in performance."

Here's our go-to agenda that you can copy and paste into your invite



1:1 Meeting Agenda

Hi [name],

Here's a rough guide of what we'll cover in each of our 1:1s.

Questions:

- How are you feeling?
- What are your priorities?
- What are your roadblocks
- How can I help?

Feedback:

What's working well, and what needs improvement?

STEP #2

Get prepared

Manager prep

A good 1:1 meeting requires preparation from both the manager and team member.

If you're in leadership, here's what you need to do to make these conversations valuable and beneficial.

Before your 1:1 with your team member, ask yourself these questions:

01. What have they done well over the last few weeks?
02. What positive feedback can I give them?
03. What areas could use improvement?
04. Are we focusing on the right work?

Write down **what** you want to say, and think about **how** you want it to say it.

By writing it down, it will make your feedback more effective (and save you time from having to make file notes of your conversation afterwards.)

Employee prep

The 1:1 meeting is not a monologue, it's a dialogue. That means the employee needs to come just as prepared as the manager, to make the meeting productive.

Ask your team members to do their prep prior to the meeting. Be clear about your expectations here, and remind them to come prepared for these conversations.

Get them to think through the following questions:

- 01.** What are my top 3 priorities for the next week/fortnight?
- 02.** What wins have I had since our last meeting?
- 03.** What challenges or roadblocks do I have?
- 04.** What support do I need?
- 05.** What questions do I need answered?

Get them to think these through beforehand; if they come with their thoughts jotted down—even better.

STEP #3

Give clear feedback

As Brene Brown says, 'clear is kind'. When it comes to giving performance feedback, don't waffle. It dilutes the message and obscures clarity. Be concise.

Try to eliminate any artificial sweeteners, qualifiers and unnecessary extras. And by that, we mean the things that soften or undermine the message. Let's look at an example:

Unclear

Now—this isn't a big deal, it's just something small. But I wanted to be completely honest with you. I'm thinking we might need to improve the approach when it comes to the communication across the project.

This feedback is weird (and that's putting it politely). The essence of the message is completely lost.

Clear and concise

I'd love to share some feedback with you. I noticed last week a couple of project deadlines were missed. I think our communication could be better. What do you think?

See the difference? Be clear—it's kind!

Once you've given feedback, it's time to stop and listen.

When the other person is sharing with you, it can be tempting to prepare your response. Instead, use self-control. Sit back and listen. Hear their perspective.

Deep, patient listening creates trust and safety. When we don't feel safe, adrenaline kicks in, and we get defensive.

Make it safe for your people by pausing and reflecting. Think about the purpose of the conversation.

We're here to grow in our understanding of one another and improve the team culture together.

STEP #4

Move from ‘doing’ to ‘developing’

Great leaders move from ‘doing’ to ‘developing’. You can use your 1:1s to make this transition.

Every leader hits that moment when they realise they need to stop ‘doing the work’, and start developing their *team* to ‘do the work’. If you find yourself jumping into doing the work for your team, instead of developing them, your 1:1s are a great place to start breaking this habit.

You can move from *doing* to *developing* by creating space for people to talk about their growth goals, skill gaps, and discussing strategies to close those gaps.

Most leaders use their 1:1s to focus solely on the tasks, and of course, a large part of the time will be spent there. But don’t lose sight of the long term goal—to help them develop and grow.

Personal development questions

Here are some personal development questions we like to incorporate into our 1:1s (every few months) to make sure we're having development-focused conversations.

HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR PEOPLE

Use these questions to help you move from 'doing' to 'developing'

What are your long and short term career goals?

If they get stuck on these questions ask them to:

Think of someone you admire, what skills do they have that you'd love to develop?

Note: this doesn't have to be about progressing up the career ladder, it can simply be skills they want to develop.

What skill gaps might stop you from getting there?

Get them to think about the *growth gap* between where they are right now and where they want to be.

It's beneficial for them to articulate the gaps. If they struggle to identify them, ask a follow up question:

What might get in the way of your success?

What can you do to close those gaps?

You want them to get practical about how they can close their skill gaps.

They might need some on-the-job mentoring, or they may need to take on a project that stretches them. They could start listening to a podcast or read specific books about the skill they want to develop.

STEP #5

Move from 'command & control' to 'coach & guide'

Control is the fastest way to kill creativity, culture and commitment. As a leader, you need to watch out for when you move into that 'command and control' zone.

When it happens, your goal is to switch gears into 'coach and guide'.

Here's how to spot the difference:

Command & control

Coach & guide

Leaders have all the answers

vs

Leaders ask the right questions

Great ideas come from the top

vs

Great ideas come from the team

Sees failure as a sign of weakness

vs

Sees failure as a sign of learning

Achieves high performance through policy

vs

Achieves high performance through people

Delegates low value & low impact work

vs

Delegates work based on the team strengths

Sees disagreement as a sign of disrespect

vs

Sees disagreement as a sign of safety

STEP #6

Run regular energy audits

Performing well and being well go hand in hand. If you want a high-performing team in the long term, you need to build your team's energy awareness. Enter the energy audit.

As a leader, you can run regular energy audits in your 1:1s. This is where you check in on your team's wellbeing. Team members often struggle to identify when they are fatigued, or they may not feel safe to raise concerns.

So, start a habit of asking about their energy levels. It will build the team's energy awareness and help you to prevent burnout on your team.

In your 1:1s run what we call an energy audit. Ask these four questions to open up an honest conversation

- On a scale of 1 - 10, how are your energy levels today?
- What drains your energy?
- What recharges your energy?
- What can I do to support you?

Here are some go-to coaching questions from our favourite coaches

Michael Bungay Stanier

From his book, 'The Coaching Habit'

01. What's on your mind?
02. And what else?
03. What's the real challenge here for you?
04. What do you (really) want (from me)?
05. How can I help?
06. If you're saying yes to this, what are you saying no to?
07. What was most useful for you?

Jerry Colonna

From his book, 'Reboot'

01. What am I not saying that needs to be said?
02. What am I saying that's not being heard?
03. What's being said that I'm not hearing?
04. How am I complicit in creating the conditions I say I didn't want?



You're all set for your next 1:1

Keen to take your team to the next level?
There are two main ways to work with us:

Culture Reset Workshops

Establish a culture people won't want to leave.

Our workshops help you unpack the behaviours holding your team back, and build a stand-out workplace culture that gets results. We'll help you get your team aligned and focused on what matters most.

Leadership Fast-tracked

Develop leaders people will want to follow.

Our leadership programs are interactive, practical and customised to your business. We'll give your managers the tools, skills and confidence they need to build a high-performing team.

Book a free Clarity Call at boldside.com.au