LEADING EFFECTIVE ONE-ON-ONES STARTER KIT

WHAT IS A ONE-ON-ONE AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?

Sometimes referred to as a one-to-one, 1:1, or a one-on-one, this critical activity is a one-on-one meeting between a leader and their direct report. These are intentional, consistently recurring conversations set aside to build trust, align goals, and focus on long-term growth.

Unlike ad hoc or reactionary interactions, one-on-ones are proactive and structured. They serve as a "container" for addressing a wide array of topics, from personal development and project updates to feedback and career aspirations.

The primary objective of one-on-ones is to get focused, intentional time with your team members for the purpose of support, encouragement, and alignment. The conversation aims to go beyond everyday interactions, offering a dedicated space for connection, feedback, and alignment.

WHAT MAKES THEM SUCH A POWERFUL TOOL FOR LEADERS AND THEIR TEAMS?

1. **Time Builds Trust:** Trust is the cornerstone of any successful working relationship. Spending intentional time with team members reinforces trust and creates an environment where both leader and team member can thrive.
2. **Growth and Development Focus:** These meetings prioritize long-term development over short-term tasks. Conversations often touch on aspirations, strengths, and growth areas, helping team members align their personal goals with the team's objectives.
3. **Clarity and Alignment:** Regular one-on-ones provide clarity on expectations, performance, and career trajectory. They also align priorities and address challenges proactively, reducing miscommunication and fostering efficiency.
4. **Empowerment and Ownership:** When conducted effectively, one-on-ones empower team members to take ownership of their roles and contributions. They feel seen, heard, and valued, which boosts engagement and morale.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF ONE-ON-ONES?

For You as a Leader:

- Provide insights into team morale, challenges, and opportunities.
- Strengthen relationships, increasing loyalty and reducing turnover.
- Offer a structured space to provide feedback, fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

For Your People:

- Ensure clarity on roles, responsibilities, and performance expectations.
- Foster a sense of belonging and connection, which boosts engagement and motivation.
- Create a space for team members to voice concerns, celebrate wins, and explore their aspirations.

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EFFECTIVE ONE-ON-ONES FAQs

HOW OFTEN (AND HOW LONG) SHOULD WE MEET?

For professional roles: 30-60 minutes weekly or bi-weekly

For production teams: Less 'formal' 20 minute monthly check-ins

PRO TIPS:

- Adjust frequency and length based on team size and individual needs—flexibility is key.
- Avoid canceling; aim for 90% attendance to build consistency.
- Leave a 10-minute buffer between meetings to reflect and reset.

WHERE SHOULD WE MEET?

Choose a private, distraction-free space (e.g., private office or meeting room).

In-person is ideal; for remote teams, use video calls (camera on preferred, voice-only as last resort).

Consider informal settings if appropriate (e.g., coffee shop, outdoor walk – focus on quality over location).

PRO TIPS:

- Minimize distractions: silence your phone and clear your space.
- Sit across from each other at an equal level; avoid barriers like desks.
- Visiting their office can show respect and give you control over meeting length.

WHAT SHOULD WE TALK ABOUT?

Split the conversation into four phases:

1. **Team Member Personal Check-In (5-10 mins):** Discuss well-being, stress, and morale.
2. **Team Member Work & Projects Update (10-20 mins):** Review current tasks, challenges, and progress.
3. **Manager Updates & Feedback Loop (10-20 mins):** Share relevant updates, provide feedback, and set new goals.
4. **Rotating Check-In (5-10 mins):** Dive into specific topics like job satisfaction, alignment, or growth plans.

PRO TIPS:

- Focus on growth and important topics, not just urgent ones.
- Schedule separate meetings for in-depth discussions.
- Don't delay critical discussions—handle them as they arise.
- Celebrate wins and provide encouragement regularly.
- Always keep the conversation professional yet approachable. Avoid letting the meeting become overly casual or rigid.

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EFFECTIVE ONE-ON-ONES FAQs CONTINUED

HOW SHOULD I APPROACH THE CONVERSATION?

Empowerment: Ask questions to guide team members in problem-solving.

Flexibility: Be ready to adjust topics as urgent or sensitive needs arise.

Balance: Offer direction or advice when appropriate.

HOW SHOULD I KEEP TRACK OF WHAT WE DISCUSS?

Use handwritten notes to minimize distractions. Capture key points, actions, and decisions only. Pause notetaking during sensitive or emotional discussions.

PRO TIPS:

- Be subtle: Avoid excessive writing to keep the conversation flowing naturally.
- Summarize post-meeting: Consolidate notes immediately after to ensure clarity and follow-up.
- Encourage notetaking: Suggest they also take notes to model expectations, enhance accountability, and ensure alignment.

HOW SHOULD I PREPARE?

Use the "One-on-One Preparation Worksheet" to outline topics, questions, and agenda items. Review previous meeting notes and follow-ups to ensure continuity. Assess the team member's work, projects, and any feedback you plan to share.

PRO TIPS:

- Block prep time: Schedule 10-15 minutes before the meeting to review previous notes and plan.
- Focus on wins: Identify positive feedback or accomplishments to celebrate during the meeting.
- Plan specific questions: Tailor your questions to the individual's recent work and goals.

WHAT SHOULD I AVOID DOING?

Canceling Often: Regularly skipping or rescheduling undermines trust and signals a lack of priority. Aim for 90% attendance.

Making It Only About Work: Overemphasizing tasks or deliverables misses the opportunity to connect personally and foster growth.

Criticism-Only Conversations: Balance constructive feedback with recognition and encouragement to keep morale high.

One-Size-Fits-All Approach: Treating all team members one-on-ones the same can miss individual needs, preferences, and goals.

Neglecting Follow-Up: Failing to follow through on action items or feedback discussed can erode credibility and momentum.

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ONE-ON-ONE PREPARATION WORKSHEET

Team Member Name:	**Date:**
Team Member Personal Check-In: (Discuss personal well-being, stress levels, and morale)	
Team Member Work & Projects Update: Dive into previous actions, current challenges, ongoing tasks, project updates, obstacles)	**Actions, Decisions, or Follow-Ups** ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Manager Updates & Feedback Loop: (new policies; performance feedback; new goals)	**Actions, Decisions, or Follow-Ups**
	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Rotating Check-In: (Job Satisfaction, Expectations & Alignment, Priorities/Winning, Challenges & Growth Plan)	
Additional Notes: (New Goals, Projects, Responsibilities, or Significant Changes Discussed/Agreed Upon)	

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ONE-ON-ONE SAMPLE QUESTIONS

BE OPEN, BE CURIOUS, AND BE SINCERE!

TEAM MEMBER PERSONAL CHECK-IN: Sample Questions

- On a scale of 1-10, how's your stress level right now?
- How are you feeling about your work this week?
- What one word best describes how you're doing today?
- Anything you'd like to make sure we cover today?
- How's [specific personal detail, e.g., hobby, recent event] going? (if appropriate)

WORK & PROJECTS UPDATE: Sample Questions

- What's something you've done recently that you're proud of? Here's something I've noticed and appreciated: [specific example].
- What's top-of-mind for you right now at work?
- Where are you with [specific project/task/goal]? How are things going with the action steps or challenges we discussed in our last meeting?
- Are you on pace to meet your deadlines or goals this week? Is anything you need?
- What obstacles or barriers are you currently facing? How can I help?
- How are things going with the team? Any challenges I should be aware of?
- Who on the team has really stood out or been a great collaborator recently?
- Are there any processes or tasks you think we could improve as a team to be more effective? Do you have any ideas or suggestions for how to adjust it?
- What's one thing you're really enjoying in your role right now? Is there anything you're working on that feels particularly draining?

MANAGER UPDATE AND FEEDBACK LOOP: Sample Questions

- I wanted to share something we're working on: [new initiative, project, or goal]. How do you feel about it, and do you see opportunities to get involved? Any thoughts or ideas to make this initiative successful?
- What can I do to support you in completing [specific project/task/goal]? Do you have everything you need to stay on track? What would make things easier or more effective?
- Would you be willing to take on [specific new project/responsibility]? How do you feel about that? How will this new responsibility affect your current workload? Is there anything we should adjust?
- Are there any challenges or friction points with other teams or departments that I should know about?
- What roadblocks are you running into, and how can I help clear the path?
- Is there anything I'm doing—or not doing—that is making your work harder?
- How can I make things better for you? What's one thing you wish I'd stop, start, or continue doing to help you and the team succeed?

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ROTATING CHECK-IN & GENERAL QUESTIONS

SAMPLE GENERAL COACHING QUESTIONS:

- What is exciting to you about this?
- What do you think is best?
- How do you feel about it?
- What is the opportunity here? What is the challenge?
- What part of the situation have you not yet explored?
- What other angles can you think of?
- If you could do it over again, what would you do differently?
- What is the action plan? What will you have to do to get the job done?

ROTATE THE FOLLOWING CHECK-IN QUESTIONS ACCORDING TO THE WEEK OF THE MONTH YOUR ONE-ON-ONE TAKES PLACE

1ST WEEK: Job Satisfaction Check-in

- Scale of 1 to 10, how happy/fulfilled are you in your current role?
- Are you feeling more overwhelmed, underwhelmed, or just right in terms of the level of challenge you face in your current role?
- How do you wish you were able to grow in your role at work in the coming months?
- What do you wish were true of your role/career that currently isn't? Do you have an idea of what you'd want to do to make that a reality?
- What do you wish you were able to do, learn, or be a part of in your role that you are not currently? How are you currently growing?
- Do you feel like you're able to do what you do best at work?

2ND WEEK: Expectations & Alignment Check-In

- Do you feel like you're able to succeed in your role? If not, what's holding you back?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how clear do you think the expectations for your role are?
- Do you feel like you know what metrics or measures are used to evaluate your success?
- Are there tasks or projects on your plate that feel outside the scope/domain of your role?
- How would you rate your contribution recently? What are you most proud of?
- Discuss areas where you see them excelling and note any progress they've made recently. Share areas for growth or improvement you'd like them to focus on, along with actionable suggestions.
- If there are gaps between what you're seeing and what you expected, say something like: "I've noticed ____, which made me realize we may have different ideas. Let's clarify."

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ROTATING CHECK-IN QUESTIONS CONTINUED

3RD WEEK: Challenges & Growth Check-in

- On a scale of 1 to 10, do you feel like you have the materials and equipment you need to do your work effectively? What's missing? Is there anything that would be helpful, even if not entirely necessary?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, do you feel like your co-workers are committed to delivering high-quality work? What could we do to improve that rating?
- Are there any tools, resources, or processes that are lacking or creating unnecessary barriers?
- Are there any challenges or frustrations in our current workflows or systems that we could address to make your work easier?
- Are there any tools, trainings, or development opportunities you believe would be beneficial for you or the team?
- What's one area where you feel the team or organization could grow to better support you or your role?
- Are there specific skills or areas of expertise you'd like to develop that we haven't discussed yet?
- Is there anything in your role or our environment that feels especially draining or demotivating?
- Are there any long-term goals or growth opportunities you'd like to explore, either in your current role or beyond?
- What's one challenge, big or small, that you think we should prioritize solving as a team or organization?

4TH WEEK: Aligning Priorities and Definition of Winning Check-In

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how often do you feel like you're "succeeding" or "winning" in your role? What about as a team? What could move that number up to an 8 or 9?
- What's one thing I could do differently or better to help you feel more set up for success?
- What ideas do you have for how we, as a team, could be more effective in achieving success?
- What do you see as the most important thing you're working on right now? How does that align with the team's overall priorities?
- If you could only focus on one project or task to complete right now, which would have the most impact or benefit?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, do you feel like we're focused on the right priorities as a team? What would help us get more aligned?
- How aligned do you think the team is on what "winning" or "success" looks like? What would you suggest we adjust to improve that alignment?

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FIRST ONE-ON-ONE WITH A TEAM MEMBER

The first one-on-one is a unique opportunity to establish a strong foundation for future conversations. It's about creating alignment, building trust, and setting expectations for how these meetings will run moving forward. Both you and the team member might feel nervous—so use this meeting to foster mutual understanding and clarity.

OBJECTIVES FOR THE FIRST MEETING

1. **Cast a vision for the purpose and value of one-on-ones.**
    - If this is a new practice for your team, acknowledge that it's a shift. Reassure them that this initiative is about improving communication and making sure everyone has the support they need.
    - Explain the purpose of one-on-ones: to focus on long-term growth, clear communication, and mutual success.
    - Share how these conversations will help improve clarity, foster development, and provide them with consistent support.

2. **Set Expectations**
    - Let them know how often you plan to meet (e.g., weekly or bi-weekly) and the typical structure of future one-on-ones:
        - Personal Check-In
        - Work & Projects Update
        - Feedback and Future Planning
        - Rotating Topics
    - Share what they can expect from you as their leader during these meetings:
        - A supportive space for open and honest dialogue.
        - Constructive feedback to help them grow.
        - A commitment to addressing obstacles and providing guidance.

3. **Invite Their Input**
    - Ask what they need from you to feel supported. Address initial questions or concerns they might have.
    - Inquire about past experiences with one-on-ones (if they've had them) and what worked or didn't.
    - Encourage them to share any initial thoughts or concerns.

4. **Keep it light, and make it a positive experience.**
    - Avoid heavy topics or critiques
    - End the meeting on a positive note by expressing your enthusiasm for working with them and reiterating your commitment to their success

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AN EMAIL TEMPLATE TO INITIATE REGULAR ONE-ON-ONES WITH YOUR TEAM

Subject: Starting One-on-One Meetings Together

Hey [Team],

I'm excited to share that we're launching a new rhythm to help keep us connected and in sync. We're starting recurring one-on-one meetings. These consistent sessions are an opportunity for us to connect, focus on what's important, and make sure you're supported and set up for success.

Why Are We Doing This?

One-on-ones will give us dedicated time to:

- Check in on your goals, growth, and anything you're working toward.
- Talk through any challenges or roadblocks so we can tackle them together.
- Celebrate your wins and progress—big or small!
- I want this to be a space where we can align and work toward what's important to you. These meetings are all about helping you thrive.

What's Next?

Keep an eye out for an invite from me soon! These meetings will typically be [duration, e.g., 30 minutes] and happen [frequency, e.g., bi-weekly]. Our first meeting will be a chance to set the stage, talk about what to expect, and hear any thoughts or questions you might have.

I'll be honest—this is new for us, so we'll adapt and improve as we go. I'd love your input along the way to make sure these are as helpful as possible.

I'm really looking forward to these conversations and diving deeper into how we can keep growing and winning together as a team. If you have any questions before our first one, you know where to find me!

Cheers,
[Your Name]

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