

Run 1-on-1s with confidence

A guide for managers



Useful insights and practical tips for more meaningful and productive 1-on-1s.

 **Culture Amp**



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1-on-1s are critical to employee growth, development, and engagement. But many people leaders are looking for better ways to make the most of these conversations.

It can be challenging for managers to know how to read a person or a situation, to know the right questions to ask, or to know what to do with the answers.

With the right approach, managers can leverage 1-on-1s to provide the coaching and support that teams need to do their best work. In this guide, we'll share tips, templates, and best practices to make sure you're getting the most out of 1-on-1 meetings.

Let's get started!



1-on-1 meetings are recurring meetings between a manager and their direct report, that ideally go beyond simple status updates or performance conversations. The goal is to create better alignment, productivity, motivation, and growth – but getting there requires managers and employees to talk honestly about things that impact their work and experience.

These conversations might require touching on what the employee finds challenging, what they find rewarding, the state of their wellbeing, or even the strength of their work relationships.

But just because these interactions are conversations doesn't mean they're *just* conversations. For many managers, uncertainty about length, frequency, conversation topics, or tone can make 1-on-1s an intimidating and feared responsibility – and very few HR teams actually have the capacity to guide and improve manager-direct report relationships on a regular basis.

Because these relationships are crucial to the engagement, performance, and culture of any organization, we created this guide to bridge the gap by sharing strategies we developed to facilitate more meaningful, continuous conversations between managers and direct reports. This will help them build a culture of trust and psychological safety, and ultimately drive better performance.





The multi-faceted benefits of 1-on-1 meetings

Before we get into how to improve 1-on-1s, it's important to understand why they're such a vital tool. To do this, we need to see 1-on-1s as more than meetings between two people, but bridges between parts of the organization. This perspective reframes how far the benefits can reach.

Benefits for organizations

Frequent and successful 1-on-1s not only strengthen working relationships, they also help improve productivity, morale, engagement, and a sense of support and belonging across entire organizations. This makes intuitive sense but is also demonstrated by the data.

Culture Amp data shows that the response to “My company is a great place for me to make a contribution to my development” is one of the strongest indicators of engagement. Unfortunately, our management effectiveness data also shows that ‘development’ is the area direct reports rate their managers most poorly (67% satisfaction, on average) – which highlights that, ironically, we need to invest in development for managers, so they can become better at developing direct reports. If we do so, we'll be rewarded in both engagement and retention.

Speaking of retention, our data also reveals that employees who have more regular 1-on-1s with their managers are more likely to stay with the business compared to those who don't. This is another area where improvements in 1-on-1s can have widely-felt implications for an entire organization.



Benefits for managers

For managers, 1-on-1s are opportunities to strengthen relationships, develop trust, and create a safe environment for their reports to talk candidly about what matters to them. This is, of course, good for the direct report – but it's also a (sometimes unrecognized) opportunity for managers to hone their coaching skills, their listening competencies, and their ability to give clear guidance and feedback.

But even beyond developing skills, there also appears to be a direct correlation between 1-on-1s and overall manager performance. In Google's Project Oxygen study, the team found that higher-scoring managers are more likely to have frequent 1-on-1 meetings with their team members than lower-scoring managers.

Benefits for direct reports

Direct reports thrive when they receive focused attention from their managers. They're able to discuss topics outside of status updates and their task list, which results in a higher level of engagement, motivation, and the sense that they're properly equipped to excel in their role. And while the conversation with their manager is an important part of the equation, there's more to it than that. 1-on-1s afford employees the time and permission to partake in ongoing self-reflection and development opportunities.





Pitfalls for managers to avoid

The most important part of conducting a 1-on-1 is approaching each conversation from a place of mutual respect and empathy. It may seem obvious, but when a manager is juggling so many different tasks, it can be difficult to be truly present and engaged. To make this a bit easier, here are four common pitfalls for managers to avoid:

Lacking structure (or purpose)

Find the right structure and define the purpose of a 1-on-1 to ensure everyone knows what to expect. This is especially important when sensitive topics need to be discussed.

Focusing on themselves

1-on-1s are not meant to be about managers. The best, most impactful results come when managers amplify the agenda topics that are most important to their direct reports, and by listening and offering guidance when asked. This requires a conscious effort on the part of managers to speak less than they listen. 70:30 is a great listening-to-speaking ratio to follow.

Skipping meetings

1-on-1s should be at the very top (and firmly in the 'do not skip' category) of a manager's priority list. Deprioritizing these meetings sends a message that their direct reports are undervalued or unimportant.

Rushing through feedback

When managers need to deliver feedback they should make sure to prepare for it and dedicate enough time to it during the meeting. This ensures the feedback given is accurate, clear, and properly actionable – and that there's enough time set aside to discuss it.



Running 1-on-1s with confidence

Preparation is what differentiates a productive discussion from a meandering chat. Whether it's a manager's first 1-on-1 with a direct report or their hundredth, better preparation will lead to better outcomes.

Consider the following a step-by-step guide to help managers prepare and run effective 1-on-1s.

The manager's checklist for effective 1-on-1s

1. Setting the context of a 1-on-1

- ☐ Discuss the importance and benefits of 1-on-1s. This can help them understand the value and dedicate the appropriate amount of focus.
- ☐ Encourage direct reports to co-create and own the purpose of the meetings. Ask them to consider how both parties could work together to make sure the direct report gets the most value out of the meeting.
- ☐ Agree on duration and frequency. We suggest a cadence between weekly and monthly, for 30-60 minutes. The important thing is to maintain a regular frequency.
- ☐ Agree on an overall structure that still allows room to deviate if something comes up that they'd like to discuss.



- ☐ Establish where, when, and how you'll meet – i.e. Zoom, meeting room, or even going outside of the office. Always ensure that the space allows for privacy and confidential conversations.
- ☐ Be willing to adjust all of the above as you learn what works best.

2. Prepare in advance

- ☐ Agree on a shared agenda beforehand (ideally the day before).
- ☐ Consider any achievements that should be recognized or any **feedback** you might have for your direct report. Practice how to phrase your feedback.
- ☐ Avoid rescheduling the meeting at the last minute – your direct report must have a consistent meeting where they get their manager's full attention and focus.

3. Create the right environment

- ☐ Set the tone. Be punctual and warm from the moment you join the meeting. Remind them that this is their time and curate an environment of openness and safety.
- ☐ Stay present. Remove any distractions: move away from workstations and silence phones or laptops. Make your direct report feel that they're your priority.
- ☐ **Ask questions** – especially open-ended questions. Stay focused on the direct report, try to avoid shifting the conversation to yourself or others unless truly necessary.
- ☐ Take shared notes of the key points and actions that you can refer back to at a later date. Seek clarity where necessary to ensure understanding.



4. What to cover in the meeting

- ☐ Start by asking how they're doing, and do an overall work check-in.
- ☐ Confirm the agenda is still as planned.
- ☐ Ask for a follow-up on previous meeting actions and learnings.
- ☐ Ask about key successes or highlights from the week. Acknowledge any of your direct report's achievements, or instances where they contributed value.
- ☐ Check-in on key areas like their wellbeing, growth and development, work relationships, productivity, and impact.
- ☐ Ask follow-up questions if further clarity or understanding is needed on a particular point (see guide questions below).
- ☐ Ask for feedback on your role as manager, using questions like 'what is working well?', 'what is one thing I can do differently?', or 'what could I do more / less of?'

5. The final five minutes: wrapping up the 1-on-1

- ☐ Recap the meeting and close with agreed-upon actions for each person to follow-up on.
- ☐ Reflect on how the meeting went, and capture any valuable insights to apply in the next 1-on-1.

TIPS FOR 1-ON-1S IN A REMOTE ENVIRONMENT

Check-in on how remote working is affecting your direct reports:

Productivity: Do they have set hours in the day that they're most productive?

Wellbeing: Are they taking breaks and managing their energy levels?

Team relationships: Do they feel connected to and part of the team?

Try to replicate face-to-face meetings by asking everyone in video calls to have their cameras on, and work with your HR team to ensure remote workspaces are effectively set up.



The *next* step

Research consistently shows that having a strong organizational culture and putting people first, translates into better performance, engagement, wellbeing, motivation, individual growth, and a sense of belonging.

But, unfortunately, the responsibility for improving an organization's culture is often put on HR and People teams alone. This is unrealistic because the culture of an organization is created and influenced by everybody, so it should be a shared responsibility.

As we've discussed in this guide, intentional and science-backed 1-on-1 meetings are a profoundly potent tool for delivering on this responsibility. They afford managers at every level opportunities to act as beacons of engagement and performance and amplify the best parts of an organization's culture.

In essence, supporting managers to run more effective 1-on-1s is a simple yet extremely impactful method for HR leaders to start creating a performance snowball effect.

Sharing this guide, and in particular, the below 1-on-1 template, is an easy first step towards that.

But this template is just one of the ways we've used the work of the Culture Amp People Scientists to help managers run more effective 1-on-1s. Learn more about how our [1-on-1 Conversations tool](#) can foster greater alignment, connection, and growth for managers and mentees at your company.

[Learn more](#)



1-on-1 meeting template

Date: _____

Manager: _____

Direct report: _____

Shared Agenda

What's the best use of our time? Please add anything you'd like to focus on.

Check-in

How are you feeling about each criteria now?

	Awful										Fantastic
Work overall	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wellbeing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Growth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work relationships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Impact and productivity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What went well or was highlighted since our last 1-on-1?

What challenges or roadblocks are you facing right now? How can I help you?

Notes: Capture any meeting points or agreed-upon actions.

[1-on-1s are a critical driver of continuous performance conversations. Learn how Culture Amp's platform makes it simple to connect the dots and drive 1-on-1s with impact.](#)



Guiding questions for managers

In addition to the resources shared above, it's a good idea to have a bank of questions to ask in your 1-on-1 meetings. Having a mixture of well-timed and appropriately-applied questions will build rapport and stimulate deeper conversation to provide clarity for learning.

HERE ARE SOME 1-ON-1 QUESTIONS THAT MANAGERS HAVE FOUND BENEFICIAL:

- What's been top of mind for you this week?
- Last time we spoke you said X was a challenge for you, how is that going?
- What part of your job energizes you?
- What part of your job depletes you?
- Which aspects of your wellbeing are/aren't going well right now?
- What support do you need to continue/improve this?
- What are two or three new skills you'd like to learn on the job?
- Who at the company (or outside) would you like to learn from?
- Where would you like more feedback?
- In what areas of your work would you like to have more impact?
- How connected do you feel to your team?
- What could you do to improve this?
- What progress have you made on your career goals this week?
- What can I help you with between now and next time we meet?
- What do you find most helpful/least valuable about our 1-on-1s?

Learn how Culture Amp can help you implement and scale performance in the moment across the employee experience.

Let's chat