

The manager's guide to supporting high-performing teams





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As a manager, you spend your days turning topline strategy into meaningful results. This can be a challenging balance to strike, whether you're a new manager or a seasoned one. Set yourself up for success with tools that help you provide ongoing leadership and support to your employees so they can do their best work.

Continuous performance management practices empower managers to have a more open and ongoing dialogue around progress and development opportunities. In this guide, we'll share best practices and resources to help you navigate regular 1-on-1 meetings, including effective strategies for delivering feedback in the moment, employee recognition, goal setting, and development conversations.





1-on-1 meetings

1-on-1 meetings are essential for supporting your team members and guiding them toward success. These conversations offer a unique opportunity to connect with your team members on a personal level, encourage their growth and development, and provide the coaching and support they need to excel in their roles. Even exceptionally high performers benefit from regular check-ins.

Our people scientists collected data from 2000+ companies that use Culture Amp's 1-on-1s tool and found that regular and focused 1-on-1s between managers and direct reports can significantly improve the employee experience and reduce turnover. Employees who have more frequent 1-on-1s...

- **Are more motivated and have higher levels of commitment to their organization**
- **Feel more positive about their manager**
- **Believe their job performance is evaluated more fairly**
- **Feel more positive about their development opportunities**
- **Are 28% less likely to leave in a given year than those that have no 1-on-1s**

Keep the following principles in mind to maximize the impact of your 1-on-1 meetings and make them meaningful and productive for both you and your team. Whether you're an experienced manager or just starting out in leadership, these tips will help you navigate these interactions with confidence, foster a culture of open communication and continuous improvement, and motivate your team to perform at the highest level.



Best practices for 1-on-1 meetings

- ❑ **Create a consistent cadence and stick to it.** Schedule these meetings weekly or biweekly to build a habit and give your employee a safe space where they can consistently connect with you.
- ❑ **Establish a clear goal for every meeting.** Start every 1-on-1 with a clear sense of what you want to accomplish – and encourage your direct reports to do the same.
- ❑ **Align on the meeting purpose.** Make a point of asking employees what would help them get the most value from these meetings.
- ❑ **Check-in on development and performance goals.** Refer back to the employee's individual goals, make space for them to ask questions or share progress, and offer guidance or course correction when needed.
- ❑ **Balance positive and constructive feedback.** 1-on-1s are the perfect space to share both positive recognition and developmental feedback.
- ❑ **Create an environment of psychological safety.** Be punctual and warm from the moment you join the meeting. Remind your employee that this is their time, and set a tone that communicates openness and safety.
- ❑ **Practice coaching over problem-solving.** Though “coaching” and “managing” are often used interchangeably, coaching is about *guiding* individuals to find their own solutions, whereas managing is often about *telling* them how to get there.

Meeting structure and cadence

The best cadence for 1-on-1s depends on the employee's goals and preferences. Even on high-performing teams, some employees may want weekly check-ins to receive as much support as possible, while others may prefer a monthly 1-on-1 cadence that allows them to work more independently.



Encourage your employees to set and drive the agenda, and emphasize the [shared ownership](#) of the meeting. To encourage this collaborative relationship, Culture Amp's platform provides a templated [1-on-1 tool](#) where you and your direct report can create and manage shared agendas. Managers can leverage the built-in questions to ask about factors across the entire employee experience.

While the structure of the agenda will vary depending on what the employee needs, be sure to create the time and space for the following conversation topics:



PERSONAL UPDATES



**FEEDBACK
AND RECOGNITION**



WELLBEING



**WORK RELATIONSHIPS
WITH TEAMMATES,
COMPANY LEADERS, ETC.**



ROADBLOCKS



**GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES
AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS**



**QUESTIONS
OR CONCERNS**



GOAL PROGRESS



ACTION ITEMS

Check out our [1-on-1 meeting template](#) for more in-depth guidance around crafting an agenda.

1-on-1 sessions can be an invaluable tool for managers once they understand how to run them in an impactful way. Prioritizing these conversations can drastically improve employee engagement, motivation, performance, and retention.

Additional resources

- [A manager's ultimate checklist for effective 1-on-1s](#)
- [How to help managers have more impactful 1-on-1 sessions](#)
- [24 great one-on-one meeting questions](#)



Continuous feedback

Companies that adopt a culture of continuous feedback are agile – they can learn faster, adapt to change, and improve their performance. As a manager, sharing regular feedback with your team builds trust, strengthens your relationships, and allows you to track progress towards goals so you can help ensure they hit their (and your) targets.

Our people scientists have found that in companies where managers give employees actionable, regular feedback, employees are 67% more likely to agree that they feel motivated to go above and beyond than employees who don't receive this feedback. Additionally, employees who get better manager feedback are nearly 2x more engaged.

However, while many managers have no issue giving positive feedback, it's much more challenging to embrace the awkwardness and discomfort of providing critical feedback. Let's start by reframing this and instead approach these two types of feedback as *reinforcing* and *redirecting*:

REINFORCING FEEDBACK	REDIRECTING FEEDBACK
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is given when we want someone to keep doing a certain positive behavior (e.g., being proactive about taking on new challenges).• When we give this type of feed-back, we verbally reinforce the positive effects of someone's actions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is given when we want someone to stop doing X and start doing Y (e.g., speaking up more at meetings).• This type of feedback is intended to correct, inspire, and motivate better behaviors – unlike negative feedback, which only tells some-one to stop doing something.



Reinforcing feedback and redirecting feedback both qualify as constructive feedback. This kind of feedback is future-oriented and grounded in the belief that an employee can make tangible improvements as both an individual and a team member.

Culture Amp research has found that [high-performing employees](#) are uniquely motivated by constructive feedback. Providing this feedback enables your high performers to continue to improve.

A model for delivering feedback

Encourage two-way feedback and discussion when delivering feedback. The SBI model is a simple framework that improves feedback by providing clarity on the situation being addressed, the behavior the individual demonstrated, and the impact it had:

The SBI model helps individuals deliver clear, specific feedback to better inspire action.

SITUATION:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe the situation.• Be specific about when and where it occurred.
BEHAVIOR:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe the observable behavior.• Don't assume you know what the other person was thinking.
IMPACT:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe the results of the behavior.

Example of SBI feedback:

SITUATION: I noticed that you didn't say anything in the department meeting on Tuesday.

BEHAVIOR: You were very quiet even when we discussed your projects.

IMPACT: It's helpful for the team to hear your insights during the meeting. In future department meetings, it would be great to see you contribute and update the team on how things are going. Let me know if you need help preparing to do that.



Best practices for delivering effective feedback

To deliver [constructive feedback](#) in a way that supports your high-performing team, keep the following principles in mind:

❑ 1. Be conscious of timing

Choose an appropriate time and place to give feedback. Strong emotions can cloud a person's ability to accept feedback, so it's not always best to respond in the moment. Consider waiting for a more neutral time to provide feedback.

❑ 2. Prepare ahead of time

Take the person you're about to speak with into consideration before delivering feedback. Think through questions like:

- What is the purpose of your feedback, and what do you want the outcome to be?
- Do you see value in the person changing or repeating their behavior?
- What would help the person achieve the desired outcome?

❑ 3. Provide specific examples

Specificity is essential for learning. Without it, people may be confused about exactly what you want them to continue or stop doing. Making your expectations as clear as possible sets employees up for success and empowers them to [become high performers](#).

❑ 4. Make feedback actionable (and future-focused when possible)

Research shows that **we aren't motivated to change when we receive criticism for past behavior**. In contrast, feedback that addresses what we can do moving forward to reach our goals or improve ourselves is motivating.

❑ 5. Make employee feedback a regular process

Not every action or situation will require feedback, but it's important to make regular feedback part of your routine. When reinforcing feedback is given often, redirecting feedback becomes less of an ordeal. Regular feedback also shows people that you care about their personal success.

Additional resources

- [How to give effective feedback](#)
- [Employee feedback: Examples to guide and drive development](#)
- [3 strategies for giving better feedback](#)



Employee Recognition

Consistent, meaningful recognition is critical to keeping employees engaged and motivated, and it's a way for your high-performing team to celebrate their successes – and each other.

Culture Amp research reveals that while recognition is a top-10 driver of employee engagement, nearly 30% of employees feel they don't receive the right recognition, and 50% don't believe the right people are being recognized. Employees that don't feel seen or appreciated disengage and eventually leave.

Key characteristics of effective employee recognition

Recognition is most effective when it's timely, frequent, specific, visible, inclusive, and values-based. Culture Amp created [Shoutouts](#), our employee recognition tool, with three science-backed guiding principles in mind. Use these principles to help you effectively embed recognition into your workflow at scale:

- **Make recognition timely.** That way, employees feel that they're making an impact – right away.
- **Make it easy to recognize others.** To encourage ongoing, day-to-day recognition, the tool must be low-cost and embedded in the flow of work.
- **Provide recognition in a genuine and appreciative way.** That way, recognized employees understand exactly what behavior to repeat.

Not sure what makes the most sense for your high-performing team? Check out these [20 employee recognition ideas](#) for inspiration.

Additional resources

- [12 unique examples of employee recognition in action](#)
- [Introducing Shoutouts: Make recognition part of your everyday culture](#)
- [How to recognize your top-performing employees](#)



Goal setting

Employee performance goals are a crucial part of the continuous performance process. As a manager, you hold a unique and influential position in ensuring successful goal-setting, as you have unique insight into your direct reports' needs and resources and also hold the company's interests in mind. Implementing a collaborative goal-setting process with employees will help them set mindful individual goals that map to broader company objectives.

In a survey of over 1600 companies that use Culture Amp's performance tools, our team of people scientists found that in 80% of companies, setting a goal was associated with a higher rate of promotion. Further, formal goal setting (for both business and personal development) had the biggest effect on employee retention, with employees who do not set goals 26% more likely to leave an organization than those who do.

Empowering your team to set and own clear and achievable goals gives your direct reports a sense of agency over their professional path. This is likely to translate to higher engagement, development, and achievement.

A framework for setting goals

There are many ways to go about goal setting, but we'll share one of the most common goal-setting frameworks, as well as a few examples to help you and your direct reports set successful, engaging, and aligned employee performance goals.



SMART goals allow your employees to develop a clear understanding of the goal, its purpose, how success will be measured, and its connection to broader company priorities. Goals that meet the SMART criteria are:

S	→	Specific:	Clearly defines the outcome and owner
M	→	Measurable:	Specifies milestones, key results, and a measure of success
A	→	Ambitious: (yet attainable!)	Balances difficulty and achievability
R	→	Relevant:	Aligns with broader priorities
T	→	Time-bound:	Sets a clear deadline and milestone dates

EXAMPLE OF A **SMART** GOAL:

Plan and execute four customer education webinars by April 10th, with 25+ attendees and 80%+ satisfied/very satisfied rate for each webinar.

EXAMPLE OF A **NOT-SO-SMART** GOAL:

Run 2x more webinars and increase attendance and satisfaction rates.

Involving your direct reports in the goal-planning process gives them a stake in their professional development. It also expands their perspective to include the team's workflow and broader company objectives. An employee's goals provide context for coaching and development conversations. Checking in on goals during 1-on-1s allows you to provide continuous support.

Additional resources

- [Goal setting for agile teams](#)
- [A framework for employee performance goals \(with examples\)](#)
- [Aligning business needs to employee development goals](#)



Employee development

Simply put, employers want highly skilled employees, and employees want to succeed in their roles. With the right support, employees can use development opportunities to acquire new skills, take action on the feedback they've received, and add further value to their work.

Culture Amp data shows that employee development is the number one reason an employee stays or leaves a company, as well as the second-most influential driver of engagement. Further, an employee is 43% more likely to leave if their manager doesn't show any interest in their career aspirations.

Your talent is your company's most important asset, and any investment in their growth can improve loyalty and retention while increasing workplace productivity and creativity. These factors add up quickly and contribute to meaningful business impact.

Building employee development plans

An individual development plan (IDP) is an easy and meaningful way to support your direct reports in creating growth opportunities. You can help an employee create an individual development plan in just four steps. Here's how:

1. COMPLETE A SELF-REFLECTION

To start, have the employee fill out a self-reflection.

The reflection should touch on three key areas:

- **Motivation and strengths**
- **Long-term career vision**
- **Short-term objectives**

Together, these criteria give employees a better understanding of their career path, the skills and experience they need to achieve their current goals, and the competencies and proficiencies that will prepare them for their next role.



2. BUILD AN ACTIONABLE INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

With the information from the self-reflection in hand, your employee is ready to start building their individual development plan. Together, take the following steps:

- **Review the plan objective:** This will most likely be the short-term objective from the self-reflection or what the employee will work towards following the creation of their individual development plan.
- **Identify growth areas:** Work with the employee to determine the skills and behaviors they need to learn or strengthen to achieve their objective.
- **Build development goals:** Lastly, encourage employees to set realistic, measurable goals that will help them improve the identified growth areas and bring them closer to their overall objective. Consider the three E's – experience, exposure, and education – as you translate goals into next steps.

3. REVIEW THE PLAN TOGETHER

This step can go before or after step two, depending on your employee preferences. Each employee and their manager must meet to discuss their self-assessment and proposed IDP. This ensures both parties agree on the employee's strengths, areas for improvement, interests, goals, and organizational requirements, as well as what success would look like.

During these conversations, ask lots of questions and work to understand each employee's career aspirations. Provide a business perspective and shed light on how you see business priorities evolving in the coming months. This will help employees envision how their career aspirations can align with changing business needs.



4. IMPLEMENT THE PLAN AND EVALUATE OUTCOMES

While the employee pursues the training and development identified in the plan, meet with them frequently to help track progress, share feedback, and evaluate their performance. These continuous manager check-ins provide an opportunity to share perspectives, remove obstacles and barriers, and support employees to reach their goals more efficiently.

Encouraging a growth mindset supports a continuous approach to learning and is ultimately reflected in higher-performing teams.

Additional resources

- [The importance of employee development in the modern workplace](#)
- [Aligning business needs to employee development goals](#)
- [A guide to creating a successful individual development plan](#)





Putting it into *practice*

Effective management has an undeniable impact on team morale, productivity, retention, and business success. Managers have a unique opportunity to support the growth and performance of their teams and make meaningful improvements to both employee engagement and performance.

Encouraging a culture of continuous feedback within the organization starts with managers, and we hope the tools in this guide will help managers incorporate these practices into their workflow.



Learn how Culture Amp supports the full array of continuous performance manager practices in one central place for easy reference come formal review time.

Contact us