mesh

The Manager's Guide to

Easy One-on-Ones

Useful tips and insights on how
to have more meaningful and productive 1-on-1s.

E-Book

Table of Contents

- The secret sauce of employee retention: quality 1:1s — 03
- Benefits of 1:1 meetings — 05
- Avoid these 4 one-on-one stumbling blocks — 06
- The manager’s checklist for running a smooth 1:1 — 07
- Questions to ask in a 1:1 meeting — 10

The secret sauce of employee retention: quality 1:1s

Just so we're all on the same page, let's review what 1:1s are.

A 1:1 is a recurring scheduled meeting for managers to check in with direct reports. This meeting covers all the pressing issues, frustrations, career conversations, and ideas that cannot fit into daily stand-ups, emails, or Slack DMs.

People need communication and a sense of connection. And 1:1s are a great time for managers to connect with, engage, and retain people. Studies indicate that over one-quarter of employees are at risk for turnover. Not only does this come as a cost to the company, but it also becomes difficult for managers to manage performance with limited resources. The tricky part is that most employees don't leave companies, they leave managers.

★★☆☆☆

"Employees don't leave companies, they leave managers."

According to a Gallup study, 50% of 7200 people left a job because of a bad manager.

Having regular, high-quality 1:1s is one way to address this issue. Spend these meetings:

Connecting with employees and building relationships

Helping them find meaning and value in their work

Recognizing achievements and making them feel valued

Having conversations about growth and improvement

How often you have 1:1 meetings and how you communicate as a manager is key to making work better. One survey found that employees whose managers hold regular meetings with them are almost three times as likely to be engaged as employees whose managers do not hold regular meetings with them. This goes to show that there is a clear correlation between employee engagement and having a great manager.

The employee, on the other hand, might feel apprehensive to give honest feedback to their manager because of the power dynamic that exists. However, it is important for them to be candid and say what's on their mind. Otherwise, managers will not have areas for improvement.

At a Glance,
here are some features of 1:1s:

1. Employees set the agenda.
2. The agenda typically is a mix of day-to-day challenges, job satisfaction, and career trajectory.
3. 1:1s are not status updates. If status updates do need to happen, they must be kept short (less than 5 minutes).
4. The feedback mechanism in a 1:1 ensures that performance conversations happen more than just once a year.

Benefits of 1:1 meetings

Before we begin to explore how to improve on 1:1s, it's important to understand why they are vital to the performance management process. While they are a great way to know your team on a personal and professional basis, here are some more benefits of 1:1 meetings:

Builds better relationships

A 1:1 empowers you to know your team on a deeper level. Find out what motivates them, learn about their career aspirations and how you as a manager can inspire them to do their best work. A 1:1 is also a great (and sometimes unrecognized) opportunity for managers to hone their coaching skills and the ability to give clear feedback and guidance.

Uncovers potential problems

The private nature of a 1:1 means that employees feel safe from judgement and can talk about interpersonal issues within the team. After all, there is no one else in the meeting, unlike a weekly stand-up. The meeting also helps pick up small issues that, if ignored, can snowball into a much bigger problem.

Great time to diagnose performance

In a 1:1, a manager gives focused attention. He or she addresses performance-related issues at a regular cadence that helps an individual do their work better. This conversation also allows an employee the time to self-reflect and develop a deeper self-awareness before their performance review.

Gives the opportunity to recognize great work

Don't forget to thank your employees - it's not something managers do enough. While one-on-ones are great for giving constructive feedback and course-correcting, these meetings are also a great time to acknowledge and thank an employee for their extra

Avoid these 4 one-on-one stumbling blocks

Remember that 1:1s are not just about daily task updates. They're an opportunity for you to draw connections between day-to-day tasks and the overarching business goals.

It is also important for managers to remain empathetic and respectful with their direct report during the 1:1. This may seem obvious, but when a manager is juggling many tasks at once, it can be difficult to stay present and engaged. Here are 4 such pitfalls that you can avoid as a manager:

01 Lack of structure

It's important to have a set structure during your 1:1 so that you can cover all the points relevant to the individual's performance. Especially so when discussing sensitive topics. Ask your report to own the agenda and prepare ahead of time.

02 Making it about yourself

1:1s are not about managers. Make a conscious effort to speak less than you listen. Find out how your team is feeling about work, the challenges they face, their ideas for improvement, and their expectations for career growth. Let the employee own the agenda and generally dictate the flow of the conversation. When the discussion stalls or slows down, it's on the manager to start asking questions that draw key issues out of the employee. This is especially useful when talking to introverted employees who are hesitant to open up.

03 Skipping meetings

In the day-to-day shuffle, it's easy to de-prioritize 1:1s, especially when they are not directly related to the bottom line or client work. However, this might send out the wrong signal to employees, who may feel undervalued or unimportant. Even if you can't make it to a meeting, make sure to reschedule. A simple 30-minute call can go a long way in ensuring your employees are happy and on track at work.

04 Avoid hurried conversations

There's nothing worse than doing a bunch of work and not getting feedback. Take the time out to give actionable, specific, clear, and accurate feedback to your employees. Give recognition where it's due and offer constructive feedback when relevant. Ensure that there's enough time for the direct report to be able to discuss it.

The manager's checklist for running a smooth 1:1

Preparation is key to having a productive conversation. Whether you're a first-time manager or you're a 1:1 veteran, it doesn't hurt to be prepared. Use this checklist to keep your 1:1 relevant, organized, and meaningful.

1 | Create a recurring schedule and set the context

- [ ] Discuss the importance of 1:1s with your direct reports.
- [ ] Let your direct reports co-create and own the agenda of the meeting.
- [ ] Set up a weekly, bi-weekly, or fortnightly cadence for 30 to 60 minutes. What's important is to maintain the frequency.
- [ ] Agree on a broad structure that is flexible and allows room for deviation.
- [ ] Decide on where you will meet. (E.g.: conference room, Zoom, etc).

2 | Prep for the meeting in advance

- [ ] Go over the agenda shared by the employee (typically a day before the call).
- [ ] Note down any achievements that should be commended or any feedback you might want to deliver. Consider taking some time out to phrase the feedback.

3 | Create a comfortable space to have the 1:1

- [ ] Be punctual and kind. Remind the employee that this is a safe space and encourage them to communicate openly.
- [ ] Stay present and engaged. Avoid distractions and make the person feel like they are the priority.
- [ ] Avoid shifting the conversation to yourself - ask open-ended questions that might encourage the individual to be more candid.
- [ ] Take notes so you can raise appropriate action items and follow up in future 1:1s.

4 | Be mindful during the meeting

- [ ] Ask about their general well-being and do an overall work check-in. Confirm that the agenda is as planned.
- [ ] Circle back on the previous 1:1's action points and learnings.
- [ ] Discuss key highlights of the week and acknowledge wins.
- [ ] Ask about their wellbeing, growth and learning, and work relationships. Get feedback on your role as a manager.

5 | Round up the 1:1

- Do a quick summary of the meeting and mention the action points to be discussed in the next 1:1.
- Reflect on how the meeting went and if there's something you should take over to the next meeting.

Quick tips for Remote Teams:

- On 1:1s with remote teams, ask about their productivity levels (do they feel productive at work?), wellbeing (how are they pacing themselves when working from home?), and connectivity (do they feel connected to the team and the company?)
- Try to replicate an actual in-person meeting. Ask your team to switch on their videos and work with your People Ops team to ensure remote work-places are set up well.

Questions to ask in a 1:1 meeting

Depending on who you are meeting with and the goal of the conversation, you might want to ask different questions. We've compiled here a template of questions for different scenarios. For more templates, check out our blog post that covers what questions great managers ask people in 1:1s.

1:1 Question Templates

General check-in

- Goal: To build a relationship, celebrate wins, and resolve issues.

1. How are you feeling this week? What are you most excited or worried about?
2. How did your past week/month go?
3. What immediate questions or concerns do you have?
4. Are there any roadblocks for you at work? How can I help?
5. What went well with the team recently? Who supported you? What are you thankful for?

On the flip side

Here's how you ask questions from the employee perspective.

1. Are there resources and tools I'm not using that could help me perform my job better?
2. What has your process been for accomplishing a similar task or project?

First 1:1 with a new joinee

- Goal: Lay the groundwork for a collaborative relationship and future 1:1s.

1. How did your first week/month go?
2. What are your greatest superpowers/strengths?
3. How do you like feedback - scheduled in 1:1s, or as-it-happens?
4. Let’s talk about the team and how we work.
5. Are there tools your colleagues use that you don’t know how to use or have access to?
6. What new skills would you like to develop?
7. What could you teach others from your last professional development experience?
8. Is there anyone in our organization you’d like as a mentor?
9. What training do we offer internally that could help you in your development?
10. What kind of support do you need to achieve your goals?

On the flip side

Here’s how you ask questions from the employee perspective.

1. What can I do to get the most out of my experience here?
2. Can I share an idea on how our company could be more creative or innovative?

Goal-setting 1:1

Goal: Collaborate on a list of OKRs and follow up on these in subsequent 1:1s.

1. What has been your progress on the OKRs we had set?
2. Is there anything on your plate that is not in line with your short-term goals?
3. What circumstances helped or hindered you in meeting your goals this month/quarter?
4. A year from now, what do you want to have accomplished?
5. Is there anything I can do to help you improve your day-to-day tasks?
6. What accomplishment are you most proud of so far this year/quarter?
7. How will you measure or track your progress on your goals?
8. What professional development opportunities are most in line with your long-term goals?
9. What is one skill that is hard for you that you could work on?
10. As things stand, do you think you will be able to achieve your goal? Why?

On the flip side

Here's how you ask questions from the employee perspective.

1. Do you think my long-term goals are attainable and realistic?
2. What professional development opportunities could help me achieve my goals?

Career development

- Goal: For employee development.

1. If you were not a <role>, what would you like to be?
2. Do you feel like you’re learning and growing at work?
3. What opportunities for advancement are you interested in?
4. What’s a project that you’re proud of? What other project would you like to work next?
5. What other areas of the company do you want to learn about?
6. What is a recent situation you wish you had handled differently? What would you have changed?
7. How would you like to use your strengths in the future?
8. How would you like to make a bigger difference?
9. What rewards and recognition matter most to you?
10. What knowledge and skills do you need to get to the next stage of your career?

On the flip side

Here’s how you ask questions from the employee perspective.

1. What skills are needed to meet my career advancement goals?
2. What do you think is holding me back from career advancement?

Job satisfaction

- Goal: To check the level of employee engagement.

1. I’ve noticed that you’re feeling a little <adjective> than usual. Is there anything you want to talk about?
2. Are you liking work? Do you enjoy working here?
3. Is there anything you’d like to do that you feel that you don’t have the time for?
4. Do you feel like you have a good work-life balance?
5. What things about this company, presently or in the future, would lead you to see yourself somewhere else?
6. Do you feel connected to your teammates?
7. How transparent do you feel the management is?
8. Do you think that work is distributed evenly across your team?
9. Do you get company news in a timely manner?
10. How open to change are we as an organization?

On the flip side

Here’s how you ask questions from the employee perspective.

1. What can I do to make sure I stay at this organization over the next two years? Five years? Ten years?

Feedback and coaching

- Goal: To get upward feedback.

1. How can I make work easier for you?
2. Which skills would you like to continue working on?
3. What can we do to improve our 1:1s?
4. Are there any areas of work where you need more/less direction from me?
5. Are there any resources you need help with?
6. What are three actions you can take that would make sense this week?
7. What can I do to help you be more effective and engaged?
8. What areas are you struggling with in managing your team?
9. What ideas do you have on growing as a manager?
10. What do you like/dislike about my management style?

On the flip side

Here's how you ask questions from the employee perspective.

1. What outputs are most valued by you? By the team? By the organization?

Company growth

- Goal: To get insights on how to improve the company.

1. How do you think the team is working together? What can we do better?
2. What do you feel about the company’s future? Why?
3. What do you love the most about our product/service? What is your least favorite feature?
4. Is there any opportunity you feel that the company should capitalize on?
5. Do you have questions about the company’s strategy?
6. If you could change one thing about our company, what would it be?
7. How do you feel about our company culture?
8. What is fun/not fun about working here?
9. What could be improved in your work environment to help you pro duce high-quality work more efficiently?
10. Are there company values that resonate better or worse with you?

On the flip side

Here’s how you ask questions from the employee perspective.

1. How do my goals align with our team and organizational goals?
2. What are our organization’s most important goals?

www.mesh.ai

Experience the Future of Work

Companies are switching to Mesh to empower their teams to succeed without compromising on employee happiness. Discover how Mesh can help you drive culture, goal visibility and continuous improvement today.

Get a Demo

mesh