



## Impactful 1:1 Meetings

An essential responsibility of a CEO or business unit leader is to design and implement the company's communication strategy. How do messages cascade throughout the organization? What are the expectations around how we communicate with each other, with our teams, with our director reports? The importance of having agreements on how we communicate cannot be overstated. Without clarity around this, micro-cultures form, miscommunication is rampant, and employees become disengaged from the company's larger mission.

One key message we communicate to the leaders we work with is that one-on-one's should be ***the employee's meeting*** – not the managers! This is an opportunity for your team member to share with you what they are working on, and where they are stumbling or envision stumbling. You can answer questions, solve problems before they happen, applaud a team member, and connect with them more authentically than you can over email. Your job is primarily to listen. Your employee should walk away feeling heard, appreciated, and connected – the key to maintaining engaged and productive team members.

Here we've compiled three tools to get you on a path to holding impactful one-on-one meetings. The tools:

1. **1:1's Are Critical.** A compelling commentary by Ben Horowitz that gives broader context to 1:1s.
2. **Example 1:1 Template.** An example of a 1:1 meeting template. Adjust to fit your team.
3. **Guidelines for Managers:** To implement effective 1:1's



## 1:1's Are Critical

Blog post by Ben Horowitz (original source [here](#))

After I wrote *A Good Place to Work*, people flooded me with feedback about one-on-ones. About half the responders chastised me, saying that one-on-ones were useless and that I shouldn't put so much emphasis on them. The other half wanted to know how to run more effective one-on-ones. It seems to me that both groups are likely talking about two sides of the same coin.

Perhaps the CEO's most important operational responsibility is designing and implementing the communication architecture for her company. The architecture might include the organizational design, meetings, processes, email, Yammer and even one-on-one meetings with managers and employees. Absent well-designed communication architecture, information and ideas will stagnate and your company will degenerate into a bad place to work. While it is quite possible to design great communication architecture without one-on-one meetings, in most cases one-on-ones provide an excellent mechanism for information and ideas to flow up the organization and should be part of your design.

Generally, people who think one-on-one meetings are a bad idea have been victims of poorly designed one-on-one meetings. The key to a good one-on-one meeting is the understanding that it is the *employee's* meeting rather than the *manager's* meeting. This is the free-form meeting for all the pressing issues, brilliant ideas and chronic frustrations that do not fit neatly into status reports, email and other less personal and intimate mechanisms.

If you are an employee, how do you get feedback from your manager on an exciting, but only 20% formed idea that you're not sure is relevant without sounding like a fool? How do you point out that a colleague that you do not know how to work with is blocking your progress without throwing her under the bus? How do you get help when you love your job, but your personal life is melting down? Through a status report? On email? Yammer? Asana? Really? For these and other important areas of discussions, one-on-ones can be essential.



If you like structured agendas, then the employee should set the agenda. A good practice is to have the employee send you the agenda in advance. This will give her a chance to cancel the meeting if nothing is pressing. It also makes clear that it is her meeting and will take as much or as little time as she needs. During the meeting, since it's the employee's meeting, the manager should do 10% of the talking and 90% of the listening. Note that this is the opposite of most one-on-ones.

While it's not the manager's job to set the agenda or do the talking, the manager should try to draw the key issues out of the employee. The more introverted the employee, the more important this becomes. If you manage engineers, drawing out issues is an important skill to master.

Some questions that I've found to be very effective in one-on-ones:

- If we could improve in any way, how would we do it?
- What's the No. 1 problem with our organization? Why?
- What's not fun about working here?
- Who is really kicking ass in the company? Who do you admire?
- If you were me, what changes would you make?
- What don't you like about the product?
- What's the biggest opportunity that we're missing out on?
- What are we not doing that we should be doing?
- Are you happy working here?

In the end, the most important thing is that the best ideas, the biggest problems and the most intense employee life issues make their way to the people that can deal with them. One-on-ones are a time-tested way to do that, but if you have a better one, go ahead with your bad self.



# FOUR BRIDGES ADVISORY

## Effective 1:1 Meetings A Template to Consider

Purpose: To improve communications, alignment and accountability with direct reports

### Ground Rules for all of us:

- I own my stuff
- If I say it, I will do it. You can count on me.
- I am direct, clear, complete and honest in communications (even if it might hurt).
- It's my responsibility to be sure that what I am saying is heard and understood by others.
- It's my responsibility to be sure I understand what the other person is trying to communicate.

Meeting Format: 45 minute meeting; plan accordingly. **Direct report prepares and drives the agenda**, drives the discussion, keeps the meeting on time and captures and publishes the notes for follow up.

### Example Agenda

#### Information Sharing (20 minutes) from Direct Report

1. Informational and progress updates I'd like to share with you. (*Please, not a 'to-do' list review*). This includes a couple of **key issues** to bring awareness to-and may review in detail...see Key Issues below.
2. What informational updates do you have to share with me?
3. Here are the agreements made at the last meeting. Let's quickly review each.
4. Dashboard Review

#### Key Issues (20 minutes)

- Here are 1-3 issues I am wrestling with. I need your input, coaching, brainstorming, or a decision. Direct report should clearly state what they are look for from manager (e.g. a decision? Input?), and should come with options and opinions of their own.
- Optional: I'm asking for your help or support on the following issues (different from Key Issues.)

#### Meeting Review for Continuous Improvement (3 minutes)



- One thing we did well today or this week, and should continue to leverage.
- One thing we can do better.

### **Example of Extended Agenda to use 1x per month**

#### **Professional Growth (30 minutes)**

This is the opportunity to discuss your direct report's performance and aspirations. And to help them with their personal development plan, training or other things that will help them grow. The direct report should be asked to come in to this meeting with a clear plan for their growth (ie. what skills do they want to learn, how will they do that, what resources do they need).



**Effective One-on-One's -- Guidelines for Managers**

<b>What are the Basics of Great One-on-Ones?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regularly scheduled</li><li>• Never (rarely) missed</li><li>• Primary focus on the team member</li><li>• Notes &amp; follow up critical</li><li>• Clear on the purpose and expectations</li></ul>	<b>How Often do we Conduct Them?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For most, weekly with each team member</li><li>• For some, bi-weekly</li></ul>
<b>Where do we Conduct One-on-Ones?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In private is preferred, but not required</li></ul>	<b>How Long and How do we Spend our Time?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For most, 45 minutes works fine</li><li>• Content breakdown – general<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ 10-20 minutes – for them</li><li>○ 10 minutes – for you</li><li>○ 5-15 minutes – miscellaneous</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>How Do I Prepare?</b>	
<p><b>You should be able to answer the following questions for each direct report prior to each meeting.</b></p> <p>What are the critical status items (per my prior notes &amp; current situation) I need to check on?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Ideally, employee will address this in their initial check-in. If not, make sure to ask during your time.</li></ul> <p>What do I need to be sure to communicate?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ What projects or work am I involved in? What organizational issues / news / efforts should I share?</li><li>○ What meetings have I attended recently? Any updates to share about schedules, projects, workload, or company-wide messages?</li></ul> <p>What behaviors, actions, or results (for this person) am I focused on?</p>	



- What positive feedback can I give?
- What constructive feedback I can give?

What's the best type of direction I should be giving? (Telling ----- Coaching, etc.)  
Is there something new I am delegating that is necessary and/or helpful to their development?

**Good Statements or Questions to Use**

Tell me about what you've been working on	What questions do you have for me about ...?
What went well this week? What did you learn?	How can I be helpful to you?
What could have gone better?	What suggestions do you have?
Are you falling behind on anything?	How do you think we can do this better?
Are you getting ahead on anything?	What did you learn from this that you can apply?
What are you feeling confident about?	What are your future goals in this area?
What worries you?	What are your plans to get there?
What do you think are the right next steps?	How are you going to approach this?

**Tips on Running a Great Meeting**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee owns and preps agenda for their pieces</li> <li>• Remember this is a two-way conversation</li> <li>• Be a good listener</li> <li>• Treat your employee with high regard and respect</li> <li>• Be present and attentive (no interruptions)</li> </ul> <p>This is your opportunity to maximize contributions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body language counts – open posture</li> <li>• Make eye contact</li> <li>• Take time to prepare</li> <li>• Require your employee to prepare</li> </ul> <p>Take notes and follow-up</p>
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What do I do when...?	Consider this...
<p>Employee is unprepared: <i>"Sorry, I just did not have time to prepare for our meeting."</i></p> <p>You are the culprit: You gradually lose discipline are unprepared, inattentive, late or push/change meetings.</p> <p>How do we make highly effective 1:1's standard procedure throughout the company?</p>	<p><i>"Look, this is an important time for us to connect, reschedule when you are prepared."</i></p> <p>Reprioritize. 1:1 meetings are critical in at least two ways: 1) You connect with each direct report; 2) You set the example for each direct report. What behavior do you want them to cascade to the rest of the company?</p> <p>1) Set the example, 2) Consider standardizing on a common process and make it a requirement that 1:1's are held on the schedule your team commits to. No exceptions. 3) Train and retrain, role-play, celebrate and acknowledge managers who exemplify specific helpful 1:1 skills.</p>





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## One-on-One Meeting Notes Template

**Team Member:**

**Date:**

**Team Member Update:** (Notes you TAKE from THEIR 10-15 minutes)

**Manager Update:** (Notes you MAKE to prepare for YOUR 10 minutes)

**Miscellaneous Update:** (Notes you TAKE (as needed) from the final 5-10 minutes)