

## TechWell Insights

# One-on-Ones: A Framework for Feedback

By Steve Berczuk (/users/steve-berczuk) - January 28, 2020

Regular one-on-one meetings between a manager and employee are a forum to provide safe, timely feedback. But they often fall by the wayside in favor of “more important things.” Skipping one-on-ones doesn’t make sense in the short term, as their value includes the time you save in the medium and long term.

I didn’t fully appreciate the value of regular, structured one-on-one meetings (/techwell-insights/2018/01/hidden-benefit-one-one-manager-meetings) until I was in a management role. Prior to that, I had been content with the occasional meeting with my manager, supplemented by incidental conversations. But as a manager myself, I realize that it is hard to have the context I need to support the people on my team without a regular meeting cadence. And likewise, it’s important for me to have regular one-on-ones with my manager to discuss successes, challenges, and how I could do better.

While some like to gather information by talking with colleagues, that should not be the whole story. One-on-one meetings have a simple agenda that provides a framework for giving and receiving feedback and building trust. While project work can provide context for a discussion, project status should not be the focus, as there are other forums for that. One-on-ones should focus on things that help the person and the manager work better.

A schedule is important. Having a regular cadence builds trust and helps your team members know what your priorities are. You may find that the first few meetings with your team members do not seem productive, but over time you’ll begin to hear useful information.

It’s inevitable that you’ll need to adjust schedules occasionally, but that should be rare. Last-minute cancellations send a message that you don’t value the person, their time, or the interaction. If something unavoidable happens occasionally, be sure to inform the other person as much in advance as possible.

Having a regular scheduled time is also a good way to minimize other interruptions. If you both know that you will meet every week, you each can make a list of small, non-critical things to discuss. This is particularly important in organizations where people may feel like being “noisy” isn’t appreciated.

Having a framework for the conversation (<https://blog.berczuk.com/2018/01/a-contract-for-one-on-one-meetings.html>) helps you to make sure that the meetings don’t routinely become chat sessions. If you are having one-on-ones frequently, they may be short—with a good agenda, you can have a weekly touchpoint for 20 or 30 minutes, as long as you commit to follow up on some topics later.

The agenda can vary, but touching on news and feedback from both parties, career development, and action items (for both the manager and your team member) are things I consider valuable. You may not cover everything every week, but they should be on the table.

While not every one-on-one will yield dramatic revelations, it’s hard to know in advance which ones will. Having the opportunity is key to building a relationship, making it easier for you to help your team and your team to help you.



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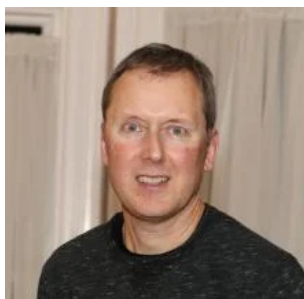
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