



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO 1:1 MEETINGS



FOR MANAGERS
AND EMPLOYEES

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IT'S MORE THAN A MEETING

WHY 1:1 MEETINGS ARE VALUABLE
TO MANAGERS AND EMPLOYEES

Have you met with your manager lately?
We hope so!

The 1:1 meeting is a tool both managers and employees are taking advantage of more than ever. As organizations shift to ongoing performance management, there's a real trend toward having regular check-ins between managers and employees.

Unfortunately, very few organizations give managers and employees the guidance to improve how they discuss challenges and give feedback. So, we're stepping in to help. The Ultimate Guide to 1:1 meetings for Managers and Employees is your one-stop shop for preparing, hosting or attending these critical meetings.

At Saba, we're big fans of the 1:1 meeting. Here's why:



ALL VOICES COME TO THE TABLE

If you're the manager of a large team who holds all-hands or other group meetings, you already know that some voices are just louder. Quieter employees may be attentive, but might not readily speak up in a group setting. A regular 1:1 meeting is the chance to connect equally with all team members, so everyone has a chance to have their say in a safe place. It's also a great way to learn firsthand any morale issues that may be afoot.

For employees, a scheduled 1:1 meeting is your chance to have your manager's undivided attention. Whether you're outspoken, soft spoken or somewhere in the middle, a 1:1 meeting provides the opportunity for you to share your perspectives about your progresses and challenges at work.

“I love using 1:1 meetings as a way to help my direct reports get better at managing up. I schedule the 1:1 meeting but it’s up to them to come with the agenda of what they want to talk about. I add nothing to that agenda. I need to know what’s important to them, how can I help and how can I redirect and prioritize if things are a bit off base. The first few meetings can be short and awkward because they aren’t used to this type of 1:1 meeting. They’re used to sitting down and being told something. Now, they have to come in and present something. If they have five minutes’ worth of stuff, we spend five minutes; I don’t add in my own stuff and turn it into an hour-long meeting. It’s their meeting, not mine. It’s great to see how my team has taken on more ownership of their work just from this process.”

Tim Sackett

President, HRU
Technical Resources



BUILD CONNECTIONS WITH EMPLOYEES

For managers, the 1:1 meeting should be a comfortable place to get to know your employees better. Studies show that engagement soars among employees who have some form of daily communication with their managers, whether that’s face to face, digital or by phone. The 1:1 meeting time is an opportunity to learn about your employees’ interests, and any short- and long-term challenges they face outside of work, such as caring for an aging parent or sick child.

Employees, you can use your 1:1 meeting time as an opportunity to get to know your manager better, by listening and asking questions. If you’re an employee who sees your managers infrequently because you work remotely or in different office locations, the 1:1 meeting provides structured time to connect at a regular cadence.

GET A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF DEVELOPMENT GOALS

One great way to increase employee retention is to give employees a structured opportunity to discuss their career aspirations.

Formalizing and documenting discussions about career progression can have rewarding benefits for employees. For organizations, providing learning and development opportunities is a business-critical priority for increasing skills, staying competitive and improving employee engagement.

One-on-one meetings are excellent places to explore these topics and build a plan that outlines the steps the employee needs to take to make progress.

EMPLOYEES SHOULD BE THINKING ABOUT:

- Where do you want to go?
- What are your aspirations?
- How do you get there?

MANAGERS SHOULD BE THINKING ABOUT:

- What skills (classes, certifications, experience) does the employee need?
- What stretch goals might be valuable to support career growth and development?
- What are the employee's most valuable talents and skills?



IT'S OKAY TO ASK FOR FEEDBACK

Managers, when was the last time you asked employees to give insights about how you're doing? It's been awhile, right? We don't blame you. It's awkward to approach someone, even your direct reports, with what can be a loaded question. No one wants to upset the boss!

Instead, consider 1:1 meetings a far more valuable way to solicit feedback from employees. Asking how you can support an employee when talking about a task might lead to a more honest discussion about instances when support didn't meet their needs.

Employees, while the 1:1 meeting is a good time to ask for feedback on work, projects or initiatives you want your manager to recognize, it can also be your turn for upward feedback where you give performance feedback to your boss.

NUTS AND BOLTS: BOLTS:

THE BASICS OF 1:1 MEETINGS



One-on-one meetings look deceptively simple because it's just two people and two chairs. Or maybe you're both on video chat. Perhaps you're drinking some coffee or tea. Easy, right?

Not exactly. We propose some forethought and planning go into creating your 1:1 meetings.

Managers, here are a few things to consider to help make the 1:1 meeting with your employees the best it can be.

Employees, stay tuned: We have some tips for you in an upcoming section.

LENGTH

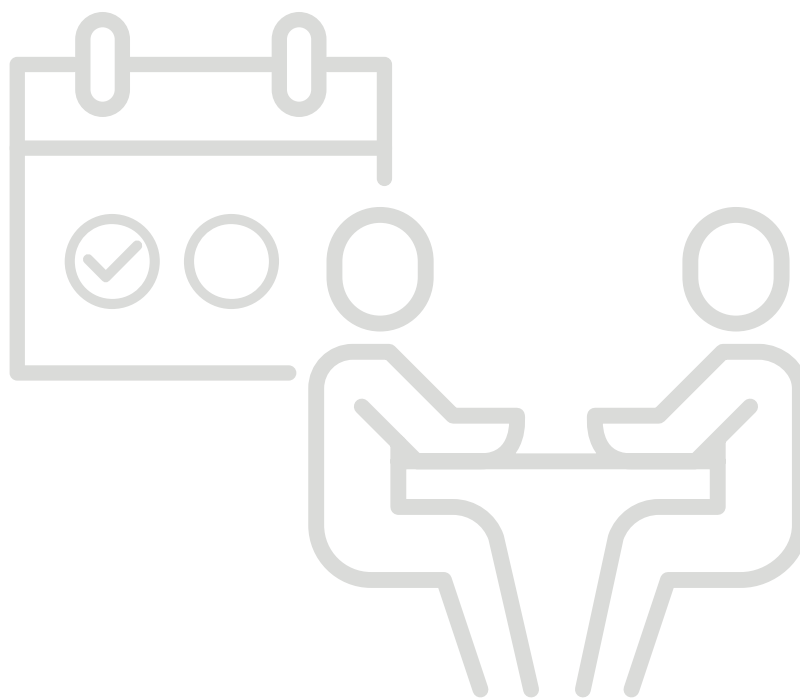
Structure the meeting to be as long as needed to cover the topics that need to be discussed. That could be one hour, as short as thirty minutes, or even less. The key is for both manager and employee to be fully present and engaged in the discussion, however long it lasts.



Pro tip: Schedule your 1:1 meetings early in the morning so there's less chance a work emergency will hijack your work day and the meeting. If possible, block the 15-minute period after the meeting ends just in case your employee needs more time.

FREQUENCY

How often do you need to meet? That frequency will depend on the size of the team, and how much support employees need to be successful in their roles. Weekly, twice a month or even once a month could be the right frequency. The key is to schedule them at regular intervals as a repeating event in your calendars. No matter the frequency, we've got tips to help you structure your 1:1 meetings so they're efficient, effective and produce results.



MANAGERS: DON'T CANCEL THAT MEETING!

When managers cancel 1:1 meetings frequently, it can send a message to the employee that their time is not valuable and their concerns not important. Consider a quick check in rather than cancelling all together. Squeezing in a 15-minute conversation in person or over the phone is better than waiting another week, two weeks or a month to hear what's happening.



LOCATION

If possible, skip out to a local coffee shop occasionally for a change of scenery. Bonus points for going on foot. A brisk walk can help conversation flow more easily. If you have to meet at the office, make sure to close the door, turn your phone off, and minimize other distractions such as email and other messaging apps. If the meeting takes places over the phone or video conferencing software, make sure to keep your focus on the conversation at hand and close other browser windows.

AGENDA

We'll cover these later in this guide, but having one is a popular 1:1 meeting tactic (and for good reason).

 [Go to the agenda section now...](#)



Please Do Not Interrupt

1:1 MEETING IN PROGRESS

Good Stuff Is Happening



 **SABA**

DOOR HANGER

Here's a handy door hanger you can use to ensure you're not interrupted during your 1:1 meeting.


 [Download a PDF version now...](#)


TOP-SECRET TIPS ON PREPARING FOR THE

1:1 MEETING FOR MANAGERS





Regular 1:1 meetings give managers the opportunity to provide real-time feedback to employees so there's a better chance of changing or supporting behavior. It's an essential part of building a culture of feedback.

 **Provide real-time feedback to employees**


 **Building a culture of feedback**


A QUICK AND EASY WAY TO STRUCTURE YOUR 1:1 MEETING

 Key wins/challenges and what they mean

 Ways the manager can support the employee

 Learning and career development

 Upcoming projects to plan for

 Informal chat about life, family, hobbies

FIRST THINGS FIRST: WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

The manager's purpose for conducting 1:1 meetings is to coach employees to achieve the best performance possible. The key to high-performance is regular coaching and feedback. Why? When given well, ongoing coaching and feedback reinforces positive behaviors and corrects the not-so-positive ones.

KEEP IT INFORMAL

Another benefit of 1:1 meetings is the ability to make the conversation more informal – and beneficial – than the annual performance review. Because it's no secret. For almost everyone involved the annual performance review is a dreadful experience. It's a single, backwards-looking event between manager and employee that can impede the reception of feedback and limit honest dialogue.

The regularity of 1:1 meetings helps both sides open up in a more relaxed manner about day-to-day challenges and achievements. It's one reason why ongoing performance management practices like regular 1:1 meetings helps to build strong working relationships and trust between managers and employees.

While 1:1 meetings can have a more informal vibe than the annual review, they should be structured in such a way to ensure important performance topics are addressed – whether that's delivering constructive or positive feedback, discussing goal progress or development plans.

When 1:1 meetings are held consistently, it limits surprises because both manager and employee are having regular conversations about what is and isn't working. Not only does this meeting cadence translate into truly useful conversations, it also helps the manager (and employee) develop excellent communication skills.

MANAGERS: FIVE CORE TOPICS TO COVER IN A 1:1 MEETING

One-on-one meetings don't have to be boring or repetitive; however, they can have some common elements. Here are five general topics to cover in some way during a 1:1 meeting.

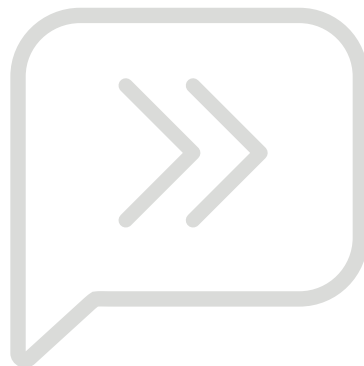
1. BRIEF REVIEW SINCE THE LAST MEETING

You don't want to get into task management or project updates that aren't critical, so this topic area shouldn't be a huge portion of the meeting. For the most part, both you and your employee probably know what has happened since the last meeting. But for managers with a virtual team, this could be a valuable conversation starter. And if you're trying to develop self-awareness skills in employees, it could be a great exercise for them.

By asking these questions, you are coaching your employees towards self-awareness and self-management. Coaching is an effective way to help your employees continuously improve their skills, experience, and ability to contribute.

2. DISCUSS NEW ITEMS

One of the drivers of employee engagement is making a connection between work and the company goals. Managers, share with your employees any new projects that impact their work, as well as any projects in which the employee doesn't have direct involvement, but should be aware of.



HAVE AN EMPLOYEE RESPOND TO TWO SIMPLE QUESTIONS:

1. What have you done exceptionally well since our last meeting?

Make the employee answer this question first. Don't let them skip over it! Employees do great stuff all the time. Celebrate a bit!

2. What, if anything, would you have done differently?

This question encourages employees to reflect on a recent project or experience that didn't turn out the way they might have liked, and identify steps to improve on it in future.

A COUPLE OF SAMPLE STAY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ARE:

Is the job turning out to be what you expected?

What's one thing your last organization did that we don't do?

➔ Check out more sample questions in the Manager's Toolbox section of this guide.



3. GET IN THE GOALS GAME

Speaking of goals, this is also the perfect moment to conduct a quick review of employee goals. Make sure your employee is on track to accomplish them! Find out if anything could impact the employee's action plan. A vacation, leave of absence or cross-functional dependency can impact timelines for completion. If goals need to be modified or cancelled, have a conversation about it. Also use this time to set new goals.

4. HELP THEM WANT TO STAY

During the 1:1 meeting, managers can ask a stay interview question. Stay interviews are designed to find out what employees like about their job and why they choose to stay with the company.

No matter how long employees have been with the company, organizational leaders can gain valuable information for their retention strategy by asking these types of questions. Additionally, managers can learn more about what they're doing well and how they can better support the employee.

A word of caution about asking these kinds of questions: Don't put the employee on the spot. Let them know in advance the question you're going to ask so they can come prepared to give feedback.

5. WRAP IT UP WITH NEXT STEPS

Before wrapping up the meeting, discuss any items that will carry over to the next meeting and document them. Many performance management solutions provide the ability to centralize meeting data in a secure way. Whatever process you use to document these discussions, be consistent so that you can use this meeting history to continue the conversation in future.



Don't forget to conclude the meeting by thanking your employee for their work and support.

BUILDING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR EMPLOYEES AND MANAGERS

WHEN CONVERSATIONS DON'T QUITE GO AS PLANNED

Perhaps your employee needed to vent about a stressful situation. Or maybe you just got chatty and veered off the agenda. It happens and it's okay. Try to end the meeting with at least one piece of work accomplished, such as a quick review of the employee's current goals. If you need to schedule a bit of extra time to cover something important when you run out of time, that's a good compromise.

WHEN AN EMPLOYEE DOESN'T PREPARE FOR THE 1:1 MEETING

For a 1:1 meeting to be truly effective, it needs to be a two-way dialogue where the employee is prepared to contribute. If an employee shows up for a 1:1 meeting without bringing or contributing to an agenda, use this time to find out why. Address challenges that may be getting in the employee's way and clarify your expectations for future meetings.

AND DON'T FORGET: PERFORMANCE SHOULD BE A STANDING AGENDA ITEM

While 1:1 meetings aren't the same as a performance review meeting, it should still be used to provide performance feedback. Because employees want regular feedback – both positive and constructive. If performance is always on the agenda, you'll have the opportunity to celebrate successes and address any issues as they come up.

“The best managers understand ‘Time of Possession’ when participating in 1:1 meetings with their direct reports. The rule goes like this – if you're anywhere close to talking as much as you're listening, you're doing it wrong. The best managers create 1:1 meeting environments where their direct report talks at least 70 percent of the time. Practice asking questions instead of telling people what you think, and you'll be on your way to better 1:1 meetings!”

Kris Dunn

Chief Human Resources
Officer, Kinetix

SUPER-SECRET TIPS ON PREPARING FOR THE
1:1 MEETING
FOR EMPLOYEES



FIRST THINGS FIRST: WHAT'S IN THIS FOR ME?

It takes two people to make a 1:1 meeting successful. Your manager is on the hook to prepare for this important meeting and so are you!

BUT SHOULDN'T THIS MEETING HAPPEN JUST ONCE PER YEAR?

The 1:1 meeting isn't the same as a performance review, which usually takes place annually. Yes, the discussion will include performance, but the meeting is really about feedback—both positive and constructive.

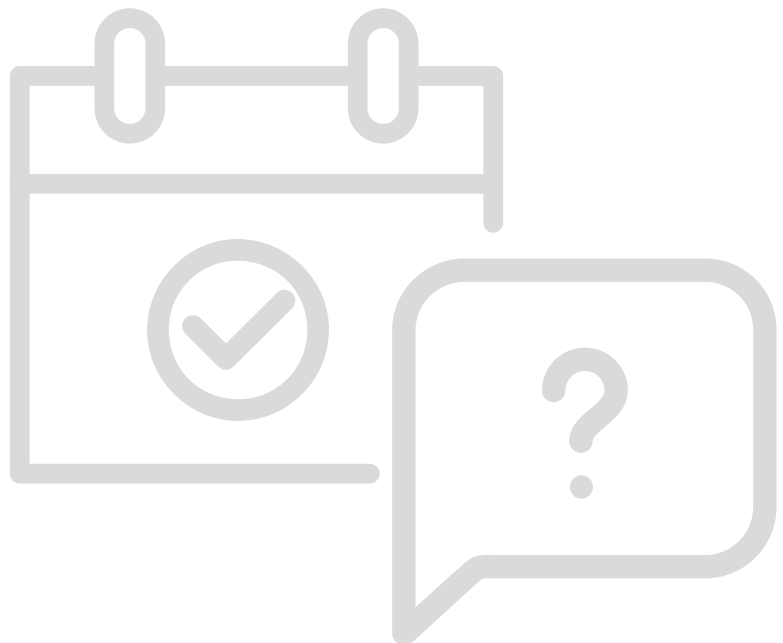
Everyone likes knowing how they're doing. And if you're not doing something well, you deserve to know before it becomes a disciplinary issue or affects your performance review.

That said, 1:1 meetings are only as good as the conversation. Having a meeting where your manager just talks isn't productive. You need to come to the conversation prepared.

“Hockey legend Wayne Gretzky once said, ‘You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take.’ Employees should view a 1:1 meeting as their shot to get some of the things they want. If you want to advance in the company, this is your chance to find out how. Ask for training. Tell your manager what excites you about your job. Go to a 1:1 meeting prepared. It's not fair to expect the company to read your mind.”

Sharlyn Lauby

President, ITM Group
HR Bartender Blog



3 TIPS TO MAKE 1:1 MEETINGS A PRIORITY

- 1 Work with your manager to **establish a consistent schedule** for your 1:1 meetings (e.g. every second Tuesday at 2 p.m.). If your manager can't do that...
- 2 **Bring your calendar to each meeting.** At the end of a meeting, suggest scheduling the next meeting. If that doesn't work...
- 3 Wait a couple of weeks and ask for the meeting. Pop into your manager's office or **send an email to request a meeting.**



Don't rely on your manager to do all the heavy lifting around scheduling. Sometimes managers get distracted by day-to-day work demands and forget to schedule them. In other words, just because you aren't having 1:1 meetings doesn't mean your manager isn't interested in holding them.

GET YOUR AGENDA AND YOUR THOUGHTS ORGANIZED

Once the meeting is scheduled, dedicate time to preparing for the meeting, which should include some time spent thinking about your performance.

Prepare specific responses and examples to both questions. It shows you took the time to think about it in depth. And it's possible that you'll remember something your manager either wasn't aware of or had forgotten about.

Preparation also means thinking about questions or topics to bring up during the meeting. These agenda items typically involve what's happening with your team, department, the organization or the company's goals. If your manager doesn't bring up these topics, it's okay to ask if there are any new projects or company updates you should know about.

HERE ARE TWO QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. What have you done well?

It can be tempting to think about the negative, but focus on how you can hold yourself accountable to answering this question first. Don't sell yourself short. No matter how large or small, share a recent win.

2. What could you have done differently?

Note that this question doesn't ask what you did wrong. There's a reason for that. There are plenty of times when we accomplish something but it could have been done in a better way.



AND SPEAKING OF GOALS...

You also want to provide your manager with an update on your goals.

Which goals are on track? Which goals might need revisiting? If a goal is off track, come prepared to discuss why, what it will take to get it on track and whether the goal needs to be changed or scrapped. If your recommendation is to eliminate a goal, come to the meeting prepared to present another goal. It's possible you won't need it, but come prepared anyway.

LOOK AHEAD TO NEXT STEPS

Before ending the meeting, both you and your manager should recap what you plan to do before the next meeting.

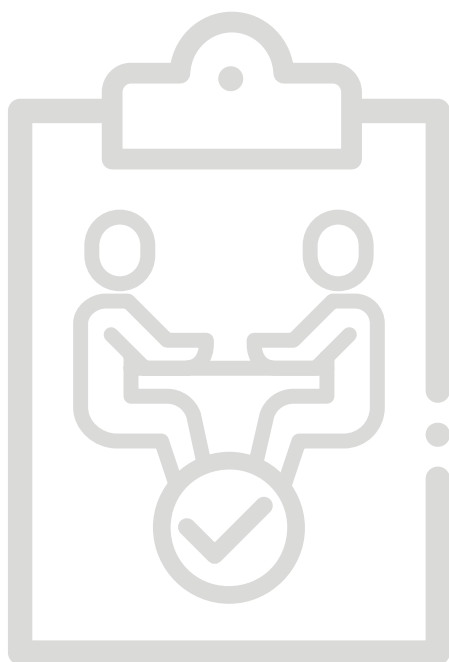
Discuss where notes from the meeting will be located, so both of you have access to them. Your organization may already have a system or process in place to do this step.





THE NEW
1:1 MEETING
TO CHOOSE AN AGENDA OR NOT

If you've ever participated in 1:1 meetings, you know there are many different ways to structure them. There's the free-form, talk about whatever's on your mind type of 1:1 meeting and then there are 1:1 meetings that rock and roll with a firm agenda.



The structure of an agenda can **promote trust, raise fresh questions and encourage efficiencies**. It can also be helpful when orienting new employees to the practice, especially if they haven't had 1:1 meetings regularly in previous roles.

WE MAKE THE CALL: AGENDAS ARE TOPS

We suggest using an agenda to keep the meeting efficient and focused. After all, most of us tend to be a little more on task when we have a schedule. Of course, sometimes agendas need to be thrown out the window because a long, free-form conversation must take place. But for most meetings, an agenda will help define two important elements: the action plan and follow up.

AGENDA 101 FOR MANAGERS

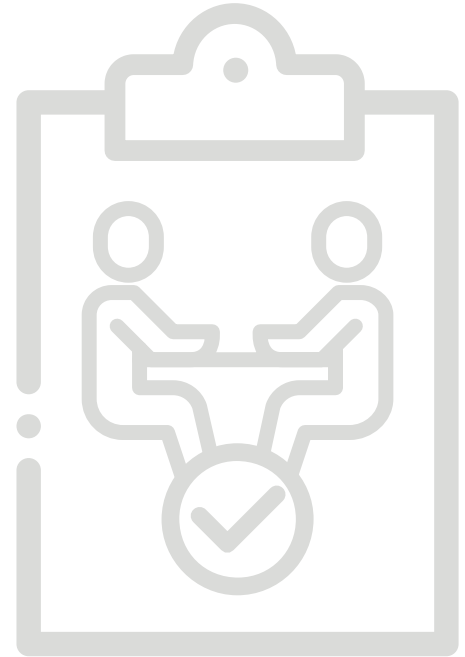
When using an agenda for 1:1 meetings, part of the time will be spent with manager follow up. As the manager, you should briefly review the notes from your last 1:1 meetings to check in on outstanding items.

Without an action plan and follow up, it's too easy to forget important details you commit to deliver. We understand that it's tough to get your work done as well as manage a team, but having a concise to-do list that comes out of the 1:1 meeting can keep work moving on vital projects. Additionally, your employees know you're looking out for them. That can make a world of difference to your team.

AGENDA 101 FOR EMPLOYEES

Depending on the type of agenda your manager chooses, you may have meeting prep tasks, such as sending your meeting notes to your manager ahead of time. Your action plan may also include updating goals or reflecting on a conversation starter topic sent to you in advance.

No matter the format, you'll want to think about potential roadblocks to success with current and upcoming work. And don't forget to note some of the successes you've had so you can make sure your manager knows! By having ideas on paper to consider, you move the meeting from simply just a conversation to actual decisions that must be made. Go, you!



STAY COMMITTED

Let's face it. We all get busy and that can make it tough to follow up on promises you made at the last meeting. Try scheduling time in your calendar so the follow-up is already added to your weekly schedule. Use a color code for the follow up and commit to pay attention when they're due.



The Very Important Rule of 1:1 Meetings:

Avoid focusing the meeting just on work in progress. Use the meeting to ensure employees have everything they need to be successful in their job—tools, resources, skills and support.

CHOOSE YOUR AGENDA

Both employees and managers can use these agenda templates to focus the conversation and stay on track. These agendas are provided as guides rather than rigid schedules. They'll help you maintain a consistent structure and flow, while ensuring all the critical topics are covered.

WHICH MEETING AGENDA IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

We've set these up as one-hour agendas, but you can adjust the timing and order to fit your unique needs.



THE MOVIN' AND GROOVIN 1:1 MEETING



Good news for the week: The employee kicks things off by sharing what's going well, makes them happy or gave them a feeling of accomplishment.	10 mins
5 VITs (Very Important Things): The employee talks about five things (more or less) that have captured their attention and how they contribute to or take away from the team's or business's success.	20 mins
Upcoming hot items: What's coming up that needs to be shared? Personal or professional, here's the time to raise a flag.	10 mins
Career development: Update on the employee's goals and career development plans.	10 mins
Anything else: Anything the employee needs the manager's support for in the next week.	10 mins



THE BRISK AND BUSY 1:1 MEETING



Updates from previous meeting: The manager and employee report on action items from the previous meeting.	10 mins
Key wins/challenges: The employee reviews their strongest work or challenges since the last meeting and what it means for the team or business.	20 mins
Career development: The employee reports back on action they took to further their learning or career development.	20 mins
Anything else: This gives space for the conversation to flow from the rest of the agenda or to cover anything pertinent the manager or employee need to discuss.	10 mins



THE TERRIFIC TEAM 1:1 MEETING



Hello again! Informal catch up about hobbies, vacation plans, family, anything. Get a feel for how the employee is doing overall.	10 mins
Manager's turn: The manager follows up with action items from the last meeting.	20 mins
Employee's turn: The employee reports back on action they took to further their learning or career development.	20 mins
Manager requests feedback: Tell me what I can do to help you?	10 mins

QUICK AGENDA

Don't have time to download an agenda or craft your own?
Use this quick meeting guide.



[Download a PDF version now...](#)



QUICK 1:1 MEETING AGENDA		
	Informal catch up	10 mins
	Employee concerns	20 mins
	Your notes/comments	20 mins
	Action planning	10 mins

TO-DO LIST

What key wins, challenges, tasks or projects have you worked on this week that you need to tell your manager? Jot them here or log them in your organization's performance management system.

 [Download a PDF version now...](#)



TO-DO LIST		PRIORITY 
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MANAGERS TOOLBOX

10 INSIGHTFUL QUESTIONS
YOU NEED TO ASK



Even with the best of intentions, sometimes 1:1 meetings can get a little dry. Here are some smart questions to help engage employees in a future-focused discussion about their performance and career development.

You don't need to ask all of these questions all of the time, but you should be asking at least some of these questions some of the time.

Rotate these questions through your 1:1 meetings regularly to give your employees the chance to think critically about their work, their future goals and reinforce that you are a resource, not just a delegator or appraiser. These questions also show that you care as much about their well-being as you do about their performance.

- ① What motivates you at work?
- ① What excites you most in your work?
- ① What skills do you get to use most?
- ① Do you have any skills that you aren't using often enough?
- ① Think back to your last three projects: Is there one thing you would do differently next time?
- ① Is there anything preventing you from doing your job as well as you'd like?
- ① Are there any knowledge areas or skills you'd like to develop to help you be more effective?
- ① What is one thing I could do to better support you?
- ① Are you happy at work?
- ① Are you able to do things you enjoy outside of work to manage stress?

“To get more out of your 1:1 meeting, go beyond the typical task/project laundry list discussion and instead ask good questions. Doing so will set up a ‘listen and learn’ dynamic between manager and employee. For example, as the employee you could ask, ‘What’s one thing I should refocus my attention on?’ And as the manager you could ask, ‘What’s one thing you accomplished this month that you’re proud of?’ Take this approach and you’ll spark a relationship-building dialogue grounded in curiosity and interest in the other person.”

Jamie Resker

Founder and Practice Leader,
Employee Performance Solutions

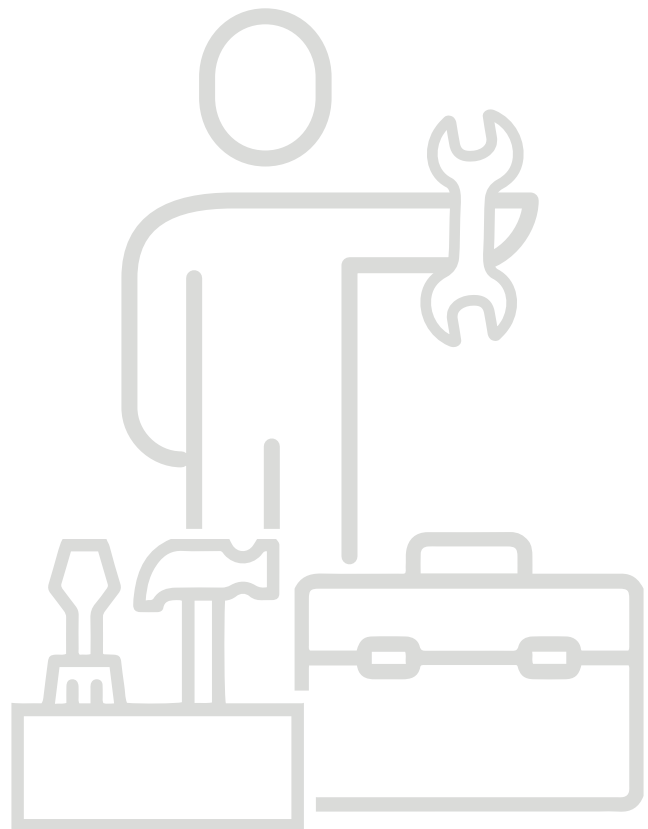
IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT ASKING

On the flip side, you also have to make sure you're actively listening to the responses to the questions you ask. One of the best ways to show you're focused is to summarize the discussion and work together to form a plan of action where necessary.

WANT TO UP YOUR COACHING GAME?

Download these handy templates to add to your coaching toolbox and help your employees thrive.

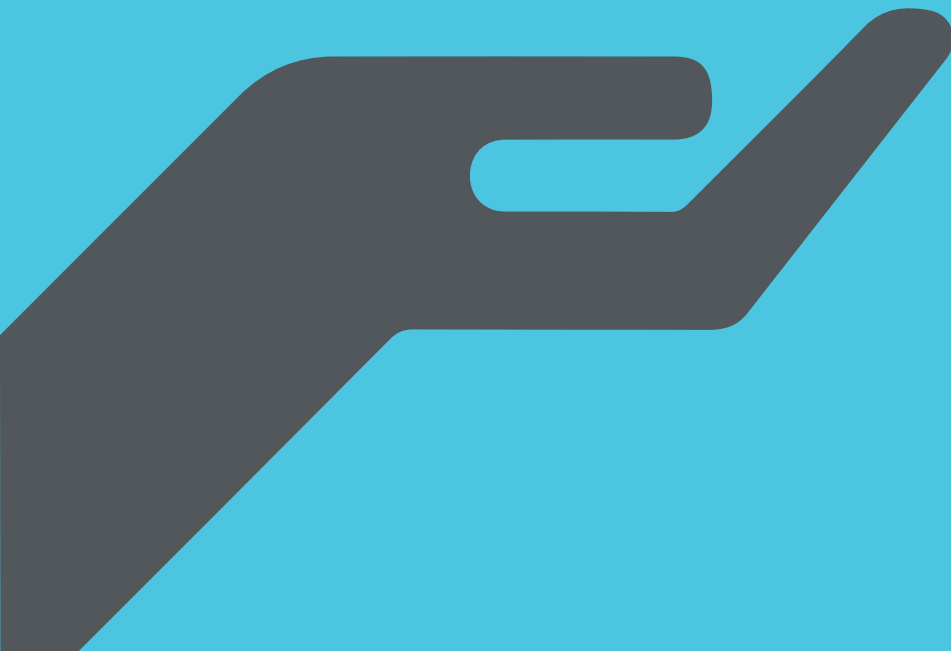
- [↓ Employee Feedback and Coaching Templates](#)
- [↓ Employee Development Templates](#)
- [↓ Career Management Plan Template](#)





FEEDBACK

THE GIFT YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR



As stated earlier, the purpose of the 1:1 meeting is to provide feedback that reinforces and improves performance. Giving feedback can be tough, whether you're a manager trying to deliver constructive feedback or an employee who needs to provide upward feedback.

No matter how intimidating the process might be, it's important managers and employees regularly exchange feedback.

TAKE THE FEAR OUT OF FEEDBACK

To help everyone in your workplace get more comfortable with employee feedback, check out:

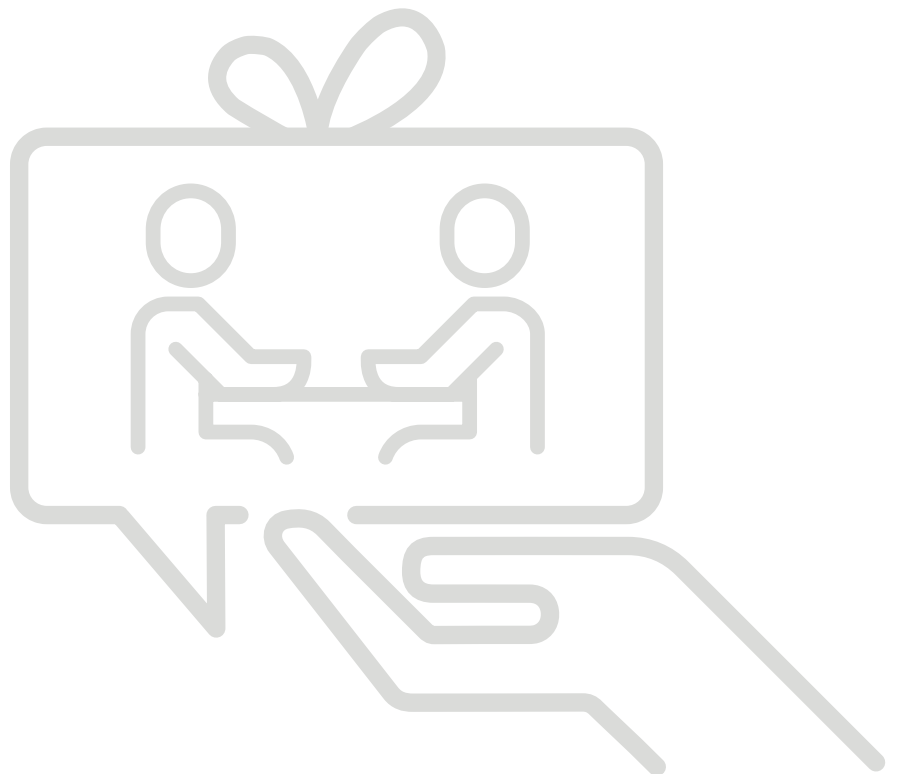
 [How to Give \(and Get\) Feedback.](#)

MORE TOOLS TO HELP YOU GET BETTER AT GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

 [How to Interpret Feedback](#)

 [How to Give Feedback That Affects Change](#)

 [Practical Ways to Receive Feedback](#)



MAKE 1:1 MEETINGS A PRIORITY

Effective 1:1 meetings help to build strong working relationships and trust between managers and employees. And that working relationship can have a huge impact on employee engagement. So make 1:1 meetings a priority.

These conversations connect and drive your organization's entire talent management strategy – from onboarding new hires, to supporting a culture of learning and development, to recognizing and rewarding success, to supporting career mobility and succession – and help to ensure greater alignment between employees and business objectives. For managers and employees, we hope this guide helps you have regular conversations that support a more meaningful experience of work.

SABA CAN HELP

Saba delivers a cloud-based Intelligent Talent Management™ solution used by leading organizations worldwide to hire, develop, engage and inspire their people. Intelligent Talent Management uses machine learning to offer proactive, personalized recommendations on candidates, connections and content to help your employees and organization lead and succeed. For more information, visit <http://www.saba.com>.

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