Effective Meetings: One-to-ones

Regular one-to-one meetings are an essential part of building effective working relationships, particularly between managers and individuals in their team. They also form an important part of the ongoing Staff Review and Development (SRD) cycle. They are conversations around what is happening on a day-to-day basis, which can help to motivate and engage employees, and guide them on their personal and professional development journey.
Top tips for having effective one-to-ones:

1. **Meet regularly**  
   One-to-one meetings should be scheduled on a recurring basis. This might be weekly, fortnightly or monthly, but having them as a recurring shows commitment from both parties. It demonstrates that the manager has time dedicated to the individual and enables questions or comments to be raised in a dedicated space, rather than arising on an ad hoc basis.

2. **Be prepared**  
   Take time to note down points you’d like to raise and discuss in the meeting. This is particularly important for the team member who guides the conversation. It could be that you have a brief standing agenda and bring other items to the discussion as they arise. If you think an item warrants a detailed discussion, or input from other parties, it might be best to raise this in advance of the meeting.

3. **Be punctual**  
   Both parties should arrive on time. This demonstrates a commitment to each other and the process as whole. When faced with a large number of regular meetings, it can sometimes feel like cancelling a weekly meeting might give you back some time in your day. However, without a specific time and place for a one-to-one, those items will still need to be addressed and are likely to be raised in another, less efficient and conducive way.

4. **Be present**  
   This is a dedicated space so devote your full attention, being aware to remove or mitigate any potential distractions. Make sure your one-to-one occurs in a private space away from the rest of the team. One-to-ones should take place where people do not need to be afraid that they might be overheard. This also encourages engagement and attention to the discussion.

5. **Check-in**  
   One-to-ones are a conversation, as opposed to a formal meeting. Why not start with a general check in on a more personal level, if this is appropriate for the person (they may not wish to share personal information but you can still ask after their wellbeing). This can help both parties get to know each other and helps the manager understand any factors that might be contributing to the individuals work at a given time.

6. **Be positive**  
   Sharing a success or complimenting them on a particular piece of work is a good way to start a one-to-one as it creates a positive environment for further discussion. In the same way, close the meeting on a positive note. Ending with a note of appreciation and saying ‘thank you’ can have a big impact. Words of affirmation mean a great deal. You don’t have to say something that doesn’t feel authentic but you can talk about something they’re doing well.

7. **Focus on the individual**  
   The team member should lead the conversation and ask questions that will open up the discussion. Remember the one-to-one is a conversation in which any issues with current activity and how to solve them can be raised, as well as talking about progress and development opportunities. The manager needs to strike a balance between asking questions and actively listening to what their team member has to say.
8. Review objectives

It is important for one-to-one meetings to consider short-term objectives (priorities for the weeks ahead), but also to find time to consider longer-term objectives. All staff should have an annual SRD meeting where objectives and a development plan for the year ahead are agreed. When scheduling recurring one-to-one meetings, it is a good idea to ensure that at least once a term, the subject of the meeting is to revisit the objectives and development plan set at the SRD. It is important to keep objectives SMART, which helps to clarify and record them.

9. Wellbeing

Maintain an open and supportive dialogue around workload and wellbeing. The one-to-one provides the opportunity for regular check-ins – for the team member to raise any concerns, and the manager to ask relevant questions, e.g. how manageable is your workload? There is then space for both parties to work together and discuss practical solutions and any possible training needs, for example, help with prioritisation or delegating work.

10. Manage accountabilities

Make sure the last few minutes of the meeting are assigned to run through what each of you have agreed to do and by when. Put your notes in a central place and re-visit past meetings to check that next steps have been taken. Actions should always be followed up – give yourself a reminder to check in regularly.

Personal and Professional Development (PPD) have a range of short courses and online modules to help both the line manager and team member gain the most from the one-to-ones.

Top tip

Why not use this Trello Board template for planning your one-to-ones? This includes content such as team member topics, manager’s topics, goals and actions. Both the team member and manager can add to the board before the meeting. This helps guide the discussion and is a great way of assigning and tracking any follow-up actions.