



Manager Tools LLC

Shownotes
One on Ones

[Blog Post]

Our recommendations for the single most effective management tool - the one-on-one.

[Cast]

Anybody who's listened to Manager Tools for any length of time knows that One on Ones is the most important things managers do. Managers are responsible for results and retention, and we recommend One on Ones as the single most powerful thing we know a manager can do to improve his relationship or her relationship with their directs, which leads to better results. It's the most important thing we recommend. No question.

1. What One on Ones Are

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a. When You Do One on Ones

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1. What One on Ones Are. We've told many, many conferences over the years, and many, many managers and executives that if there were only one thing we were forced to teach to the rest of our lives to managers, it would be One on Ones. And we're the guys you want to learn about One on Ones from, because we didn't like them. But, the second rule of the Army is, if it's stupid but it works, it's not stupid.

Whether you like it or not, you're paid to be effective. If you're not doing One on Ones now, the **single most effective thing Manager Tools can recommend to improve the results of you and your team, is to start meeting with them each regularly, weekly, for a half hour.** We call these meetings One on Ones.

2. Why We Do One on Ones. In order to get the most out of your people, in order to close the gap between where they are, and what they're capable of, you have to know each of your team members individually. The idea of fairness gets applied to management inappropriately, because the implication is, I will manage all of my people the same. That's a bad idea. Different people require different things from bosses. If I'm a top performer, and you insist on treating me identically as your bottom performer, I'm going to feel mistreated. Frankly, the bottom performer is too, if you treat him or her the way you treat me, if I'm your top performer.

It's really very simple. Every person who works for you is an individual. It is not hard at all to get to know the individual strengths and weakness of each of your people. If you listen to managers, and you hear them talk about their teams, you can tell the difference between an average or a poor manager, and a great manager pretty quickly.

Here's the way an average or a poor manager describes their team. "Oh Mike, I've got a fine team of people. They're a bunch of good people. We work well together. I feel like we've got our eye on the ball. Every once in a while things fall through the cracks, but somebody picks it back up, and we achieve good numbers. Things are on track."

Here's what great managers sound like. "Well, Mike, I've got a great team. Robert, who works for me, just is absolutely brilliant at financial stuff. He'll be CFO someday, no question. Tara, who sits right next to him, knows our customers so well, that whenever there's a problem, I just know I can turn to Tara. Gwen really, really understands the operations side, in a way that sometimes even I don't."

Can you see the difference?

The great manager who knows what to assign to whom, what to expect from who, and why they do what they do.

Effective managers encourage relationships. We're creating a supposition here, we're positing that a better relationship will improve results. The question then becomes, how do you get a relationship? You have one or two choices.

You can say, "I don't think relationships are that important, so I am not going to do One on Ones." OK, that's fine. We hope you would get great results, we don't think you will. Although if you don't do One on Ones and you have great relationships, we're OK with that. We don't need you to do One on Ones, we need you to have great relationships because that leads to great results.

You could also say "well, I don't know that relationships are all that important, but I'm going to try it and see what happens." Then you will become a believer as well. That's what happened to Mark. He didn't believe they'd work. He started doing them and begrudgingly got dragged kicking and screaming into, "these things really are going to work."

The question becomes, How do you create a relationship with your directs?

The answer is to **communicate regularly about issues of interest to the directs.**

Here's what most managers do. On Monday or Tuesday they go up to somebody and say, "Hey Bob, how was your weekend, wife kids good, everybody good, yeah, OK great, where we are on project X?" Asking vague personal questions that clearly aren't the most important thing in the world to you is not building a relationship. What you really want to know is where we are in project X. Directs hate that. Or let's put it this way, directs hate bosses who think that they are creating a relationship by doing that.

There is no other way to create a relationship with a direct than to sit down and spend time with them. Now we know everybody is busy and we wish there were better way. But if you want to have better relationship with your directs, you must communicate regularly with them.

Most managers say they want a team feel, "I want everybody work for me to feel like a part of a team." [We generally write the word "team" in quotation marks, because this is not really a team. Teams don't have bosses that can fire them. Directs draw a circle around the team, and the boss is outside the circle.] Teams are built on trust. And how do you build trust? It's easy with human beings - you communicate. All human beings evaluate your communication with them based on two factors, quantity and quality.

Quantity is how often you talk to me. You can measure who your best friend is just by looking at your emails and voicemails, and texts and tweets, and so on.

The **quality** of someone's communication is measured by whether or not it is of value to you. In order to be effective developing relationships with our directs, we need to spend time communicating about things that are important to the direct.

3. How We Do One on Ones. A One on One is a half hour long weekly meeting with every one of your directs, structured specifically based on an agenda with 10 minutes for them, 10 minutes for you, 10 minutes to talk about the future. Every single week, no matter what, with every single direct, half an hour long, scheduled on your calendar, and rarely missed.

There are a lot of managers who sit down and talk their folks, but they don't have a structure. The structure makes an enormous difference, but the real value is scheduling it and doing it weekly.

The focus of the meeting is on the team member. It's not on you. It's not on your work. This is what's going to drive you. If you sit down and say, "Look, before we start, give me quick update on project X," you've just blown that One on One. You've blown it because now it's about what you want to talk about. You're using your boss power, your role power.

You *should* sit down and say, "OK, what's going on?" You don't talk about you in the beginning. You don't talk about your work. You don't talk about your issues. It's not a waterfall meeting, where you repeat what your boss has told you, the way your staff meeting is.

[By the way, related to One on Ones, there are two meetings we recommend to every manager every week. There's only two, that is a One on One with each of your directs and then your staff meeting. One on Ones do not take the place of staff meeting or team meeting or whatever you want to call it.]

We've had thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of managers doing One on Ones for years now. What we've learned is the moment you start asking questions, they're going to answer them, and it's going to become a dialog, and you are going to take 20, 25 minutes. What's more, you're going to be violating the fundamental reason the One on One exists, which is to give a platform to the direct to allow them to communicate to you. It's not easy for a lot of managers to get. We promise that you underestimate the extent to which you are the boss and you can do what you want and your directs cannot.

We ask executives in conferences, "How many of you go down to your direct's cubes when you need something?" And 90 plus percent of the time the direct says, "Yeah, sure. If you need me, sure. What do you need?" Yet, when your directs come interrupt you, you don't say, "Absolutely, I'm available 90% of the time." You have role power. The role power matters. It's easy for a manager to walk down and tell people what he wants, and they have to listen because he outranks them. We don't mean to overlay role power, but it matters, and you have it if you're a manager.

If you're a manager, you have a big, fat, red sign on your forehead. It says, "watch out. I'm your boss. I could fire you." If you think, folks, that your directs are telling you everything, you are smoking crack. They are not. Do you tell your boss everything? No? Well, then your directs are probably just as smart as you. They're not telling you everything.

It's easy to communicate downward. It's much harder to communicate upward. If you think going around and telling people hey, how's it going? Good weekend? Everything good, kids good? Is building a relationship, you're crazy. It's not. That's not a relationship. That's you being polite and attempting to dismiss some of your role power. If you want to create a relationship you have to spend time on it. It's as simple as that.

One on Ones exist to create a space for your directs to come to you with things that are of interest to them. One of the first things that happens when you start doing One on Ones, weekly, half-hour scheduled meetings with all of your directs, is that you notice that you get fewer questions during the week. Managers often come to us and say that they feel like things are quieter. In fact, people just aren't coming to you with hundreds of small questions because they know they can wait till the One on One.

If you don't do One on Ones and your directs are asking you lots of questions, they are probably making up things to ask you. They're asking you the question to get in front of you because they want to have a relationship with you, and they don't feel like they do. Our good friend Missy Porter noticed this. She held her One on Ones with her 20 directs on Thursdays. She was worried that she would have less time to get her work done. But she found that she got her Tuesdays back. Tuesdays freed up because she wasn't meeting with everybody. She started working on her stuff on Tuesdays. That's how powerful One on Ones can be.

a. When You Do One on Ones. There are two issues around when you have One on Ones – one is about scheduling them, the other is about the frequency.

Scheduling. The most important thing about the interval of your One on Ones or the timing or the scheduling of your One on Ones, is that they are scheduled.

We would rather you scheduled your One on Ones than you had One on Ones almost every week that were unscheduled. The core of One on One value is saying to your directs, "You're always going to have time with me. I'm always

going to be investing in the relationship." If you don't schedule your One on Ones, you're saying to your people, "This might be important in a given week. You might be important, the time with me might be valuable to me. I don't know. Let's play fast and loose with it. Let's sort of play it by ear. We'll see how things go."

The data on this are overwhelming. Managers who schedule the One on Ones are 80 percent and above in terms of compliance for completing One on Ones. Managers who don't tend to fall in the 50 percent range. Your directs know it. Your directs try to get time on your calendar if you're not doing One on Ones, and it's hard for them. They know that your schedule drives you. They know if they have time on your calendar on a regular basis, that says something to them. That says a ton more than, "I'm going to try to meet with you every week." Because they know it's a pipe dream.

Every time you try something new and then you discard it in a month because it's hard, because you haven't gotten over the McGuire Hump of the Horstman Curve, and you're not in the land of milk and honey yet where you start getting the rewards because everything's hard in the beginning. If you keep doing that, pretty soon, you'll never get a significant change to happen because you will have taught your people nothing is going to get done here that's new or different because I'm going to try it. It's going to be hard. I'm going to fail. They're just going to develop calluses to any kind of initiative you put in place, whether its management related or not.

To your directs, you are the company. You speak for the company. It's part of your role power. When the initiative comes from you and they can wait it out, but when it comes from the company, they know they can't, you lose credibility. You hurt the company in terms of your ability to carry the water for your boss or her boss or whatever, when it comes to change and initiatives and new ideas.

You've got to schedule One on Ones.

There are some of you who claim that your schedule's too busy. Look, folks, we've got to tell you something. You're not that busy. We know CEOs who are doing One on Ones every week with all their directs. Some of them are hour long.

If you don't schedule your One on Ones, you are going to be perceived as not really believing it and making it one of many things that might be important. We recommend you schedule them. We'll talk about how to schedule them at a different time. But scheduled every single week with each one of your directs.

Now, here is a caveat to the scheduling bit. It doesn't matter that the One on One actually happens in the time that it's been scheduled. The scheduling of the One on One sends a message that is different than and as important as, in a way, as actually having the One on One. The scheduling says this is going to happen. This is important. You're important.

Imagine you put a recurring meeting, folks, on your calendar that said One on One with Beth. It's every week, and there's no end date to that recurring calendar. Take a look at your calendar a month from now. What will be on your calendar in the week? The one thing that will be on your calendar in a month, unless you're a very senior executive, in which case you're scheduled months in advance, the one thing on your calendar will be that One on One. Your directs will know that. Everything will be scheduled around One on Ones. All the One on Ones will have pride of place. Everything else will move around the One on Ones, and your directs know that. It's a recurring meeting.

That said, calendars move around all the time. Things get changed, things get trumped, cancellations happen, the technology goes down, whatever. You move things around all the time. It's easier to move something that's already on the calendar than to find time for something that isn't on the calendar. You can move your One on One.

If you manage your calendar effectively, you always have the right of first refusal. If the CEO comes down and says I need you Tuesday at two o'clock, just roll over. But if your peers say I need some time with you, don't give them the time you have scheduled for your One on Ones. Having them on the calendar means you're going to be reminded of it every week. If there's a conflict, and it's a justifiable conflict, you can move it. It's more important to schedule it, even if you move it around a lot, than it is to say, "I'm just going to not schedule it, because it's going to be too hard. Calendars here are so terrible." If you tell people you're not going to schedule it, they will read that as a lack of interest in interest in continuing with it.

One thing that many of us have forgotten is that there are a lot of people who need time to prepare for a meeting, even if it's half an hour every week. They don't feel comfortable if you walk up to their cube and say, "Listen, how about if we do our One on One now?" They will say yes. But they're not saying yes to the One on One. They're saying yes to their boss who has a role power. Who's sign says, "Watch out, I'm your boss. I could fire you." They want time with you, but they're not ready. They're not pleased. They didn't have time to prep.

For half of the audience probably, time to prep is very important. If you don't schedule them, and you just go talk to people, they're going to say yes, and the meeting then will end up being about you. It starts out being convenient, it starts out being at a time that's convenient for you, and it generally goes downhill from there.

Weekly. This is another thing that's really, really important. If you're listening and you're saying, "I can't do them weekly though. I'm going to do them monthly." Don't. You can't create a relationship with another human being by talking with them for 30 minutes, once a month. When directs do monthly One on Ones, they hate them. The single biggest data point that we got back from

the various periodicities that we tried in One on Ones was whatever you do, don't do monthly One on Ones.

Further, though, the responses we got said, "My monthly One on One with my boss turned into a dog and pony show. I knew that he couldn't remember things from three or four weeks ago so I felt like I had to prepare a little presentation." Now it wasn't actually presented, but maybe it was a couple of pages of notes about successes and failures or mostly just successes. That's a business meeting. There's nothing wrong with it, and if you want to do that that's fine. Just don't call it a One on One. Don't tell people you learned it from us, and don't think you are building a relationship with your directs by meeting with them once a month. It doesn't work.

Monthly One on Ones don't work. OK, but bi-weekly now. You really can't develop the kind of relationship you want to develop if you are meeting every other week. There are a couple of reasons for this. The biggest one is, think about your calendar and about your life, folks. Think about how busy you are today or how busy you were today if you are listening to this in the car going home, or on the train going home. Ask yourself, "What's my calendar like tomorrow?" You probably have a rough idea. You know you got a couple of meetings. You're not sure about one meeting, but you're pretty sure you know, and you kind of got it in your head the couple of things you want to work on that aren't on your calendar. You might have an idea of what the next day and the day after look like. But we'd be willing to bet that you have absolutely no idea for a week and a half from now. We tend to live our lives in three to five, to seven day rolling windows that we can keep in our short-term work memory. It's just the nature of work.

If you are thinking in three to five day windows, things that are going to happen two weeks from now are definitely on the back burner. A One on One that happens every other week is always going to be on the back burner. What's worse is that if you miss every other week, you start going once a month.

We respect where you are. We know many of you have difficult situations. If you've got 30 directs, don't try to meet with them every week. If you have more than ten directs, and you're a first time manager, go to every other week until your schedule starts to tolerate that what, 12 directs, six half hours each week. After you've mastered that, it may take your three, or four or five months, then go to every week.

Mike was working at MCI when it was acquired by WorldCom and went through the bankruptcy. He had ten directs at the time and was doing One on Ones for 30 minutes every week. So, he was spending five hours a week in One on Ones. Then he started getting called into a lot of meetings around this bankruptcy. It became a fairly stressful place to be obviously. He needed time and so he started having One on Ones every other week to get five hours back. He felt like things were good, relationships were established, and so they could tolerate going to every other week. Within a couple of weeks, it just completely fell apart. Not only did he not get five hours back, he ended up spending more time. When he had weekly One on Ones, people weren't interrupting him all the time. People weren't always trying to get his attention. All the time he had gotten back, all the efficiencies, all the deep relationship that helped...the grease that made everything work smooth just evaporated simply from going weekly to bi-weekly. We don't recommend it.

A relationship isn't something you have, it is an outshoot of the behavior. If you change your behavior in a relationship, the relationship changes, the relationship is not a thing, it is the behavior.

Let's talk further about scheduling and weekly, because scheduling and weekly bothers people. We understand that. We've tried to give you a sense of why scheduling and why weekly matter, but we need to address why it bothers you and talk about how to handle this as a meeting.

We have another cast, with more guidance, which says One on Ones are business meetings. They are meetings just like any other meeting. Things are going to happen. You're going to have to change them. If, in fact, it were just a run of the mill meeting, you would say OK, we'll get it next week. But that's not the case with One on Ones. They are not run of the mill meetings.

We recommend that this be one of the most, if not the most, important meeting you have every week. This is how you are going to manage, believe it or not. It'll fundamentally transform your relationship with your directs, and you'll start getting more out of them. You'll discover your life gets easier. That's the common comment we get from people once they start doing One on Ones. "Oh, I didn't really want to do it, but suddenly, a month or two in, wow, things are way better".

The meeting is important enough that when you get a challenge, you refuse initially, and then maybe you get rolled over. When you get rolled over, then you have to reschedule it. If a meeting is important and there is a scheduling problem with the meeting, you will reschedule that meeting *immediately*. Meetings that are important, you don't want to lose the opportunity. You don't want to make it only harder a day later because peoples' calendars continue to fill up all the time. You schedule it right at the moment. You say we've got a conflict. We've got to reschedule, here are a couple of times, let's pick a time, let's move it now.

We've also got to consider the weekly part. If you have a One on One on Tuesday, and there's a conflict, you don't reschedule it for the following Monday. You only have a week in which to do it. Don't reschedule a One on One for sometime in the following week, to have no One on One in one week, and then to have two the next week. That feels weird to the direct.

The other thing we recommend is when you get a conflict, let's say the conflict happens on Monday, but the meeting's not until Wednesday. Schedule the One

on One for Tuesday. Move it forward. There's no law that says you have to move a meeting back.

It's really important, it's rarely missed. It's simply a matter of saying this is the most important meeting I have. I'm not going to miss it. I'm going to figure out how to make it happen.

b. What You Do During One on Ones. The purpose of the One on One is to develop a relationship. Folks sometimes think that developing a relationship implies there ought not be a structure about that. The issue is that this is a relationship meeting, but this is a business relationship. It's a professional relationship. This relationship is being fostered in order to produce better business results. This is still a business meeting, and so we do have an agenda.

What happens is managers say oh, yeah, we're just chatting. What most managers don't realize is when you're chatting, you're doing most of the talking. Or in the event that someone is a little bit uncomfortable with you yet, they don't know if they're going to have to fill up the full 30 minutes. They don't think they can fill up the full 30 minutes, and so they shut down almost completely. So the boss fills it up.

When you say we're going to have a relationship meeting, but then it's easy for you to talk and they're having trouble talking, and you end up sucking up all the oxygen in the meeting, it's not a relationship meeting. It ceases to become one. In fact, they're probably going to say I really don't like them, and I don't want to have them anymore.

The Agenda. One on Ones have an agenda. In 30 minutes, the agenda is 10 minutes for them, 10 minutes for you, and 10 minutes left to talk about the future.

They go first because if you went first, you would take 25 to 30 minutes. Or, after the manager gets done taking his 10 or 15 minutes, the direct feels that the manager has set the tone and the agenda for the meeting and they're supposed to respond to what they just talked about in the next 15 minutes rather than what was on their agenda. You must allow the direct to go first.

We have also learned, through trial and error, that Monday One on Ones are the most likely to be hijacked by the boss. It's sort of a benign hijacking, but nonetheless it serves a purpose in terms of an example of what not to do. You sit down with your direct in a Monday One on One and you say, "Hey, good to see you. How was your weekend?" At that moment, a totally reasonable question you would ask a friend, a business associate, anybody, at that very moment, you have hijacked the One on One. You have taken it away from what the direct wanted to talk to you about.

We also recommend starting every One on One with the same question. Mike uses "How's it going?" He found that if he didn't ask the same question every single time, his tendency would be to be to ask something he was thinking about. To discipline himself, he developed a habit of saying the same thing. We recommend you memorize your first question.

Make sure, however, you can that they get their time to talk first. Professionals think about ways that things can be effective. They try them until they figure out what's most effective, and then they deliver on that. If you've memorized your first question, you're not worried about what question to ask. Then you're turning it over to them and you're much more likely going to get the important things to them first.

We recommend telling everyone in advance that you're going to do One on Ones, and going through the agenda, so that you can educate them in your staff meeting a couple of weeks before you start. There's a quote we mention many times: "Never introduce a managerial change without first introducing that

managerial change." You're going to tell people, "This is the agenda, 10-10-10. I'm going to turn to you, and I'm going to say, 'OK, how's it going?'" and you've got the floor. You can talk about anything you want. Work, puppies, rainbows, family, weekend, politics, whatever. Talk about whatever you want, and I'll be happy to chat with you during that time."

The agenda is 10-10-10. But let's remember something. The agenda always serves the purpose of the meeting. It's never the other way around. The purpose is not built for the agenda. The agenda is a tactic to preserve and protect the strategy of building the relationship, building open, frequent communication about this that are important to the direct and to you. That's why it exists. That's the purpose, and the agenda serves it.

We do not want, particularly when you start your One on Ones, to strictly enforce the agenda. If your directs were hesitant or you were hesitant about starting One on Ones, and you started them, and at 10 minutes in, your direct is still going 900 miles an hour, just thrilled that his boss is listening to him about the problems he's facing, about the issues he's seeing, about things you don't know that are going on in the team, whatever, and you cut them off at 10 minutes, you are putting the agenda above the purpose of the meeting.

When you start your One on Ones, it's entirely possible that when you turn it over to them, they're going to start talking. They feel like somebody's starting to let the air out of the balloon, and they just can't stop talking until the air is out of their balloon. If they start talking and they're not done at 30 minutes, it's because they've wanted to tell you stuff, and they didn't think you want to listen.

If your directs, in the beginning, are still talking at 10 minutes, let them continue. Remember, you can talk to them any time you want. If they're still talking at 15 minutes, let them. If they're still talking at 29 minutes, you might want to ask them to wrap up. But let them talk for 29 minutes for weeks. Let them have their energy run its course.

We know most of you are worried, "I'm afraid my directs won't say anything."
That's not the bigger problem. The bigger problem is directs who say too much.
We promise you.

Address the issue. Let them talk for the full 30 minutes and then say, "Wow! That was great! Unfortunately, we're out of time. I'd like to keep it shorter, but I understand you want to talk, and so it's OK." In this case, because of role-power differential, because it's about the relationship, because they've got all this stuff to tell you, we allow the purpose of the meeting, relationship building, to trump the agenda. We never do it the other way around.

Now, if they're still doing this after four One on Ones, which would be about a month, then you could say, "Listen. We've been going 40 minutes or so, because I've been kind of cutting you off at 30 minutes. I'd love it if we could start whittling it down to you only taking 20 of the minutes." Just see if they can't do that, and spend another month letting them struggle to get to 20 minutes. What you do is, 20 minutes in, you say, "Hey, we're at 20 minutes. I just want to let you know." Don't cut them off, just say, "We're at 20 minutes."

Then, if after another month, they have blown through the 20-minute reminder you've given them, say, "OK. Look. I am going to start asking you to stop. I'm not just going to tell you it's 20 minutes. I'm going to ask you to stop at 20 minutes, just because this is relationship, I've got some stuff on my agenda that I want to cover, and so I'm going to ask you to stop at 20 minutes." You do that for about a month, they'll gradually get to 20 minutes.

Then after they get to 20 minutes, say, "I'd like us to get to 15 minutes." Give them another month to wrestle themselves into 15 minutes. They'll do that for a little while, and then gradually every once in a while you'll have a time where they get to 10 minutes.

90 plus percent of the time it's going to be 15 minutes for them and 15 minutes for you. In those rare instances, one out of every ten, or once a quarter, you actually finish five minutes early, that's when you can talk about the future. Keep that little ten minute wedge of the future in your head, and recognize that you only have to talk about it once every 10, 20 weeks. Normally, they're going to be 15 minutes and 15 minutes.

10 minutes for them. They get to talk about whatever they want to talk about. This is why we suggest a directionally neutral question to start off the meeting. If you say, "Give me a quick update on what you're working on," you've just skewed the meeting. What you're doing is asking the most vague and benign question designed to send a clear message - I'm turning it over to you. Trust us, your directs will talk about what they want to talk about, and it will be different.

This is an important point. You want your One on Ones to feel different with each of your directs, because each of your directs is different. The key is that we manage individuals. We don't manage groups of folks. We have a relationship, individual relationships with each person on our team. We don't manage our team like a bunch of women if they all happen to be all women, or a bunch of men, or millennial, or people above the age of 40. We treat and manage each person as an individual. That is fundamental. You do that by having a relationship with each of those folks.

In our experience, the 10 minutes most of the time is about work. It's about business. That's what your relationship is rooted in, and folks want to talk about business. Maybe they want to talk about their weekend, or they want to talk about puppies and rainbows. What they want to talk about is important to them. If you want trust, you're going to have to communicate. You're going to have to communicate frequently about things that are important to the other person.

So, it is whatever the direct wants to talk about. One of your directs is going to talk about puppies and rainbows. Another one of your directs is going to only

want to talk about work. But the fact is personal stuff matters. You want as full an understanding of what your directs are going through as possible. If they want to talk personal stuff, if they want to talk football from the weekend, you're going to spend 10 or 15 minutes talking about football.

If you have somebody who works for you who wants to talk about hockey and you're not a hockey fan, start looking at the sports pages. You need to pay attention to hockey. You need to pay attention to their team. This is how we build relationships. Now, we're not saying that you have to endorse everything they do. But you have to listen, and you have to know, and you have to have a sense of when things are going well, and when things are going poorly. Be insightful enough to ask the right question when something isn't right. When things are good, ask them what's going on. Because they have shared with you, you'll be much better off in terms of being able to have a conversation.

All of your One on Ones are going to be different. Every single time. Mark and Wendii always start with Wendii's list. It's the list of things that Mark hasn't done that Wendii's going to ping him about. "Have you done this? What about that? Did you call that person back? I'm waiting to hear back from you on this. What about that? You didn't finish __. What about this? What about that?" It makes her feel fabulous that we get through the list and Mark commits. Knowing every week that the list goes to zero, is fabulous.

Now, you might say, "Well, gee, that's not really building a relationship with Wendii." Oh yes it is. That's very important to Wendii. Sometimes the list is short, and sometimes she talks about other things. Sometimes she says, "I've got to tell you about my folks." This is not always what Mark would do but we've got to learn when it comes to relationships if we're always applying the phrase "that's not what I would do" you're making it about you and not about a great relationship. We recommend that you professionally love your directs, in the sense that you're willing to listen to what's important to them.

10 Minutes For You. Now, when it gets to your 10 minutes, you get to talk about what you want to talk about. We know you want to talk about work and you want to talk about this direct's work that probably isn't done. That's OK. You can have your list and ask all about project XYZ ABC all day long during your 10 or 15 minutes. There's nothing wrong with that. As long as you don't cause anything to have your directs start only talking about work, you're fine.

Now let's say for the first two months your directs are telling you all about their personal lives. You get some time at the end and you talk about work and then suddenly you notice after two months they start coming in and they start giving you project updates and so on. Now you have fewer questions to ask because they're answering all your questions in advance.

At that point you'd have to say, "Quick time out here. I just want to mention something. I know I ask about work. I'm not suggesting by me talking about work that this is secretly a meeting about work. It's not. Talk about what you want to talk about. Please don't talk about what you think I want to talk about, because I'm going to talk about what I want to talk about during my 10 or 15 minutes." The meeting is about encouraging effective relationships by frequent communication, and communication includes stuff that's important to the direct.

For the majority of managers we know, they want to talk about work. If you're really uncomfortable sharing your personal life, you don't have to. If you're a manager and your directs know you have a family, and you never mention them, that makes your directs wonder. They could think, either he's embarrassed about them or he's sending me a message that I shouldn't be talking about mine. But if you don't want to talk about your family, you don't have to, ever.

10 Minutes for the future. We said earlier that in 90 percent of One on Ones, you won't have time for this part. When managers start doing One on Ones, they discover after three, four, five months, that they're way more down in the weeds. It only takes a half an hour, but they know a lot more about what's going

on day to day, week to week with their directs. But managers say they feel further away from career planning discussions with their directs because they're actually managing their work now.

We recommend getting into the details. Trust us. You're not micromanaging. If every once and a while, you get in deep with one of your directs, that doesn't make you a micromanager, that means you're micromanaging one small thing, which is completely normal among the most effective managers and executives in the world. The problem in the world is not micromanagement. The danger is the absence of you managing people. Managing means knowing what the heck's going on.

You're going to get much more down in the weeds, and yet, you still need to be able to pick your head up and look ahead a little bit so that you don't get surprised by a turn that a direct is going to make based on what they want to do in the future. Now, you're going to be much better seeing and hearing and knowing what it is your directs want to do, but that said, a simple thing we recommend you do when you have a couple extra minutes, if you're going to think about career planning, is you ask where do you see yourself in a year? It's a \$64,000 question.

It lifts the conversation right up out of the weeds and into the big picture stuff, which you're obligated to do in terms of thinking about succession planning and retention as a manager, for everybody. If they say I see myself right here, I like it here, good. If they think well, I was actually thinking about broadening my horizons, maybe looking at other opportunities here in the company, it's always better to know that early. Maybe you need time to convince them to stay, because you're going to promote them, or you have a better job in mind for them working for you. Great. But you need to know, and so you ask the question, hey, where do you see yourself in a year? Let's just take a minute and talk about the future.

The other thing you do is coaching. Again, we've got a coaching model that only takes three to four minutes a week, because the direct is doing their own self development, and you are just supervising it. The coaching part of that future would be asking them OK, where are you on your project to improve your skills in X. What was due this week? What did you do? What didn't you do? Give them some positive and negative feedback. Again, we have separate guidance for that. Keep track of how well they're doing. The way you keep a project on time every week is you ask are you on time? Have you done everything? If you haven't, why haven't you? What's the new deadline going to be? Make sure you meet it.

c. Where You Do One on Ones. Let's start with the big picture answer to this question.

First, don't do a One on One in public. One on Ones are like feedback in the sense that they are for the private use of one individual. The One on One you're having with one of your directs is for you and that one direct. Every one of your One on Ones is going to be different depending upon the individuals. That's the whole point of One on Ones, getting to know the individuals who work for you. You couldn't do them in public. In other words, you couldn't conduct a One on One in the middle of a meeting with other people there, that they could hear you having your One on One.

Now, we're not suggesting there that we're going for secrecy. Public and private exist on a spectrum. There are very few things, professionally, that are done in complete privacy. Privacy implies you've got to have an office. You've got to be able to close the door. Hypothetically, some people would say private means no one can know who you're meeting with, which is just dumb. It's not going to happen. This is a real world meeting. It's a business meeting. You're not trying to hide the fact that you're meeting with somebody. It's like any other meeting. You're not trying to hide who you're meeting with. Our guiding principle is you can't do one in public, but you don't have to be completely private.

You could have a completely appropriate, totally professional, not in public, and not also in private One on One in the middle of the cafeteria at 10 in the morning. There's always a steady stream of people coming down to get coffee. You could be sitting 15 feet from the center aisle, across the table from one another or sitting down next to one another, and have a meeting that is in a public space, but it's not a public meeting, in that everyone would know that you're meeting with one person, and they're not invited to come sit down.

By the same token, while you're not in complete privacy, people can see that you're meeting, and they know probably who you are and who your direct is, you end up having a private conversation. Which is to say, no one else can overhear you.

We don't recommend that you search for privacy. If you have an office, that's the perfect spot to do it. We don't recommend you avoid your office simply because it's your office. Your directs are not afraid of your office, they're afraid of you. You don't have to close the door, either. Some people do and that's fine, and you can leave the door open and that's fine as well.

Please, don't go to the direct's office. Don't go from your office to their cube, because one person going to six or seven or 10 different places doesn't make any sense. It's much smarter to have six or seven or 10 people come to one place and frankly it makes it much easier on you. You have multiple meetings like this, they only have one. The logistics of getting out of your desk, out of your office and going finding your directs just gets in the way, and just puts another hurdle, a barrier, between you and the One on One.

If you have a cubicle it's probably a completely fine space in which to conduct a One on One. When we're thinking cubes, we're thinking a three-sided workspace that you have a desk and usually your computer is in the corner of the desk and often there's a keyboard tray. Here's our rule about your cube, if you can measure your cube and it's six feet wide or wider, and the walls on it are higher

than six to eight to 12 inches above the desk, in other words, if they're only six to eight to 12 inches high then those really aren't walls. If you have walls that are higher than that, and the width of your cube is more than six feet you can do a One on One in that cube. Have your direct wheel a chair over, if you have an extra chair, a folding chair, have them set it right down next to you, scoot over a little bit, lower your voice and have a quiet conversation.

If you're having a quiet conversation there's usually enough ambient noise in most work-places that you can have a private conversation by being masked by the ambient noise, by keyboard sounds, and people moving around, and printers, and fax machines and the hum of air conditioning and so on.

You can have One on Ones for one, two, three, four, five months in your cube and gradually build up enough trust and relationship strength that they feel they need to share with you something personal or embarrassing or they're worried about - maybe it's family, maybe it's health or sickness or something, or fear about the organization or something. At that point, if they really need a space other than your cube, they'll ask for it.

There are situations where a cubicle is not appropriate because it is too small. In that case we recommend you find a public space like the cafeteria that's not too far away, and sure, if you do them in the cafeteria and it's only 50 meters away you could do two back-to-back, there wouldn't be any problem.

The moment you see the second person come in at the bottom of the hour or at the top of the hour you say to the first person, "All right, we got to wrap up. The next person is here." You certainly wouldn't want that first person to come walk over and sit down and wait for you to finish simply because there are no doors in the cafeteria where you're meeting.

Generally we find that directs are going to be very respectful of their peers' time with you, because they want their peers to be respectful of their own time with

you during their One on Ones. That said, that all leads us to our next point, which is we don't recommend that you schedule a shared resource like a conference room, particularly if your boss owns the conference room, and you think that just by getting on the calendar for months in advance by filling it up with all your One on Ones, you have it.

You could once in a while go to Starbucks and have a cup of coffee, and the ambient noise in most Starbucks is loud enough that you can sit side-by-side and have a One on One, and have a very nice, longer than normal One on One. You could start it on the walk down there if in fact you wanted to, and then take notes afterwards to clean up.

You don't have to do it in the same place every time, you don't have to change it every time either. We would generally recommend doing it where your desk is, as long as it's not too public. By the way, if you have a cubicle as opposed to your office, and you have people coming up, you can simply turn to them and say "I'm in a One on One" and turn back and continue the conversation. You can tell your directs, "if you see me in a One on One with one of your peers, don't even come up to the desk, I'm going to send you away, check your calendar. If I'm in a One on One I'm going to ignore you, and it's rude of you to stand there and wait for me". You're the one that allows interruptions when you turn and have a conversation; it's not appropriate, it's not reasonable, don't do it.

Distant Directs. For some, your directs might be across the country. In these cases, you can hold your One on One over the phone.

That said, we're not going to tell you folks that a phone One on One is as good as a face to face One on One, it's not. But the question is not "Is it as good as a face to face One on One?" when you can't be face to face with your directs because they're distant from you. The question is "is it better than nothing at all?"

Webcams and Skype are absolutely ubiquitous today. There are some firms that ban them for security reasons and so on, but, frankly, those are less and less common every day. Our recommendation is pretty simple. Use a webcam. Even if somebody's at home. If they're driving, or if they're on the road, and they have a laptop but it'll be hard to get good WiFi or the 3G connection that they have with their little WiFi base station isn't enough, fine, then you could do it over the phone. If they're traveling, you could easily wait until the evening, and do the One on One when they're in the hotel room when they've got WiFi and you could do Skype and you could see how they're doing.

It's completely reasonable to use a webcam when you're at home and somebody else is at work in a different time zone. We generally recommend that you find time to do their One on One when they're at work. Yes, that means you may have to be in the office at midnight, or up at your desk in your house at midnight. That's far better than expecting them to do a One on One with their kids running around at 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock at night.

You can use the phone. You have to be more careful about interruptions because people won't know that you're in a One on One when you're on the phone.

Then, lastly, we recommend you have access to any document any of your directs are working on, relative to work, at any time. For distant people, that usually means some sort of shared electronic document space. That makes One on Ones, at a distance, a little bit closer to face-to-face One on Ones. They work great. They're not perfect, but they work great, and we highly recommend them.

Wrap Up

1. What One on Ones Are

2. Why We Do One on Ones

3. How We Do One on Ones

a. When You Do One on Ones

b. What You Do During One on Ones

c. Where You Do One on Ones

The most powerful thing we've ever recommended to any manager in the world is to sit down and talk to their folks on a weekly basis, regularly, like clockwork. Because, just chatting with your folks periodically, is not a way to get to know them. It doesn't work. The single most important thing you can do to improve your relationship and, therefore, your results with your team is to get to know the strengths and weaknesses of everybody who works for you as individuals, rather than as a group.

Folks, take it from Mike, who didn't used to do them, when you go to this you will never look back. We guarantee it.

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