



The Staff-Led 1:1 Development System

A People-First Leadership Workbook

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Why 1:1s fail — and how to fix it
- The staff-led model: roles, cadence, and philosophy
- The 20-minute meeting flow
- Manager rollout script and implementation plan
- Employee Prep Worksheet (printable, bring to every meeting)
- Manager Reference Card
- Commitment Tracker



What a 1:1 Actually Is

Most managers think a 1-on-1 is a status update. A check-in. Maybe a quick debrief about last week.

It's not.

A 1-on-1 is a rhythm. A relationship. A weekly investment in the person sitting across from you.

Done right, it creates clarity, surfaces problems before they become crises, and builds the kind of trust that makes people want to stay. Done wrong, or skipped entirely, it tells your team exactly how much they matter.

The heart of the 1:1 is intentionality. It should be short. If you're running it weekly, 15-20 minutes is plenty. What makes it work isn't the length. It's the consistency. The cadence is what gives it power.

Here's the thing most leaders miss: this meeting belongs to the employee. They lead it. They prepare for it. They bring the wins, the blockers, the questions. The manager's job is to ask good questions, hold accountability, and help move the person forward. If you're a manager and you're doing most of the talking, stop. Something's off.

What It Is. What It Isn't.

A 1:1 IS	A 1:1 IS NOT
A bi-directional growth conversation	A status update
A staff-led development meeting	A performance review
A weekly leadership discipline	A manager lecture or presentation
A clarity and accountability rhythm	A problem-dump session
An intentional investment in the person	A box to check on your calendar

Three Things Worth Knowing

1. The employee leads. The manager facilitates.

The team member owns the conversation. They prepare beforehand. They bring the wins, the blockers, the questions. The manager's job is to ask great questions and keep the person moving forward. If the manager talks more than 40% of the time, the system is broken.

2. Cadence is the whole game.

A 1:1 that happens inconsistently is worse than no 1:1 at all. When you cancel casually, you send a message. You tell that person — directly or indirectly — that they're not a priority. Protect this meeting like revenue. Because it is.

3. This is a service to everyone in the room.

The team member gets a voice. A structured space to surface challenges before they become crises. The manager gets real information — not the polished version people give in group settings. And the organization gets people who feel seen, developed, and invested in. That's retention. That's performance.

Record It.

Every 1:1 should be documented. Notes or audio. It doesn't matter which, as long as it happens. Without tracking, you're either talking about the same things every week or never talking about them. The record is how you measure growth, hold commitments, and show the person you're paying attention.

Role Clarity

One of the biggest reasons 1:1s fail is confusion about who owns what. Here's the answer: the employee owns the meeting. The manager owns the growth.

THE EMPLOYEE	THE MANAGER
Owns the meeting • Complete the prep worksheet before every meeting • Bring 1 win from the previous period • Bring 1 blocker or challenge • Name a development focus • Declare commitments clearly • Lead the agenda and the conversation • Ask for support when needed • Set the date for the next meeting	Owns the growth • Schedule it and protect it — no casual cancellations • Ask thoughtful, open-ended questions • Push for clarity and depth • Identify blind spots the employee can't see • Offer ONE clear piece of feedback per meeting • Hold prior commitments accountable • Surface opportunity, not just problems • Confirm next meeting date before leaving

The 60/40 Rule

The employee should be talking 60-80% of the time. If the manager is talking more than 40%, the system is off. Stop. Ask a question. Hand it back.

Cadence Standards

Frequency	Guidance
Weekly (preferred)	15-30 minutes. The gold standard. Short enough to protect, long enough to matter.
Bi-weekly (acceptable)	15-30 minutes. The gold standard. Short enough to protect, long enough to matter.
Monthly (maximum)	45-60 minutes. Use only when team size absolutely demands it.
Ad hoc or never	Not acceptable. Signals that development is optional.

The 20-Minute Flow

Here's the structure. The employee guides it. The manager holds it. Together, they move through five phases in twenty minutes.

0 – 2 MIN OPEN	EMPLOYEE Shares one win. Names what's taking up the most mental space right now.	MANAGER Listen fully. No problem-solving yet. No fixing. Just presence.
2 – 8 MIN WINS & PROGRESS	EMPLOYEE What's working? What commitments did I keep from last time? What progress did I make?	MANAGER Reinforce effective behaviors. Name the strengths you're observing out loud.
8 – 14 MIN BLOCKERS & REALITY	EMPLOYEE Where am I stuck? What feels unclear? What conversation am I avoiding?	MANAGER Ask: "What's the real issue here?" "What would progress actually look like?" "What are you not saying?" This is where growth happens.
14 – 17 MIN DEVELOPMENT	EMPLOYEE What skill or behavior needs strengthening? What feedback would help right now?	MANAGER Offer ONE clear piece of feedback. Tie it to impact, not personality.
17 – 20 MIN COMMITMENTS	EMPLOYEE What exactly am I committing to? What support do I need? When is our next meeting?	MANAGER Confirm who owns what and by when. Write it down. Both of you.

What Good Looks Like

- The employee talks 60-80% of the time.
- Real issues surface early — not during a resignation.
- Commitments are written and reviewed at the start of every meeting.
- The meeting happens. Every single week.
- The employee leaves with clarity, not more questions.



Rolling It Out

The first conversation matters. How you introduce this system will determine whether your team treats it as a gift or another management exercise. Be direct. Be specific. And mean it.

What to Say to Your Team

MANAGER ROLLOUT SCRIPT

"We're implementing a structured 1:1 rhythm."

"This isn't a performance review. It's not micromanagement. It's not about checking boxes."

"It's about ownership. You will lead the meeting. You will prepare. You will bring your wins, your blockers, and your commitments."

"My role is to ask better questions, help you see opportunity, and make sure you're clear and supported."

"We'll meet weekly if possible. Never more than 30 days apart."

"If I cancel casually, I'm signaling you don't matter. That won't happen."

"This is how we build people-first performance."

Implementation Timeline

WEEK	FOCUS
Week 1	Set the frame. Explain the purpose clearly. Distribute the Employee Prep Worksheet. Lock recurring calendar invites before you leave the room.
Week 2	Run the first full cycle. After the meeting, ask each team member: What would make this more useful for you? Adjust the questions if needed. Don't adjust the cadence.
Week 3+	Review prior commitments at the top of every meeting. Hold the cadence. Praise preparation out loud. Recalibrate if energy drops.

Common Failure Patterns

THE PATTERN	WHAT IT SIGNALS
Manager cancels casually or repeatedly	<i>"You are not a priority."</i>
Manager talks more than the employee	<i>"This is my meeting, not yours."</i>
Manager talks more than the employee	<i>Unclear expectations. Revisit the worksheet and the purpose.</i>
Commitments never reviewed	<i>"Accountability doesn't actually matter here."</i>
Every meeting sounds identical	<i>No development is happening. Go deeper on blockers.</i>

Employee Prep Sheet

Complete this before every 1:1. Bring it to the meeting.

Employee Name:

Date of Meeting:

1. My Win Since Our Last Meeting

What am I proud of? What went right?

2. What I'm Currently Working On

Where is my energy going right now?

3. What's Going Well

What feels like genuine progress?

4. Where I'm Stuck

What feels unclear, heavy, or avoided?

5. Development Focus

What skill or behavior needs strengthening?

6. My Commitment Before Our Next 1:1

I will:

By (date):

7. Support I Need From My Manager

What do you need your manager to do, provide, or decide?

Next 1:1 Date :

Time:

Manager Reference Card

Keep this handy during every 1:1.

The Ground Rules

DO

- Ask more than you tell.
- Push for clarity and depth.
- Name patterns you're observing.
- Protect the cadence.
- Offer ONE piece of feedback per meeting.
- Hold prior commitments accountable.

DON'T

- Cancel casually.
- Dominate the conversation.
- Solve every problem for them.
- Avoid tension or hard topics.
- Turn it into a status meeting.
- Let prior commitments disappear.

Power Questions — Keep These in Your Pocket

To Open

- *What's taken up the most mental space this week?*
- *What are you most proud of right now?*

On Blockers

- *What's the real issue here?*
- *What are you not saying?*
- *What would progress actually look like?*
- *Who else needs to be part of this conversation?*

On Development

- *What would you do differently if you could do it over?*
- *What skill would change everything for you in this role?*
- *What feedback would be most useful right now?*

On Commitments

- *What exactly are you committing to, and by when?*
- *What do you need from me to make that happen?*
- *When should we check in before our next meeting?*

Before You Leave Every Meeting, Confirm:

- ☐ The employee's commitment is written down — by both of you.
- ☐ A date and time for the next meeting is locked on the calendar.
- ☐ Any support you promised is noted on your end.



Commitment Tracker

Review prior commitments at the top of every meeting.

Employee Name:

Meeting date	Commitment Made	Due Date	Status

Status Key: Complete | In Progress | Not Started | Carried Forward



Notes and Follow-Ups

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin gray border, intended for handwritten notes and follow-up information.

Ownership builds performance. Performance builds trust. Trust builds retention.
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