

77 Great Questions to Ask Employees at Your Next One-On-One Meetings

One on one meetings are the cornerstone to any effective manager team member relationship from small start-ups to large corporations. What you talk about, and the one-on-one meeting questions you ask, make all the difference in the performance of your team.

The foundation of any good manager and team member relationship is rapport. If your team doesn't feel like you care about them as an individual, they're unlikely to be motivated to work hard for you. And if your team doesn't feel like you care about them and trust they can come to you, there's almost zero chance they'll be engaged at work.

Put more simply, Camille Fournier, former CTO of Rent the Runway and author of *The Manager's Path*, has learned:

“Treat your peers as interesting fellow humans and you may be surprised by what it does for their motivation, dedication and engagement.”

The key is to build rapport and trust, but how do you that?

The short answer is to be human!

Find out what's important to them and what their interests are. Start by getting to know them and then revisit asking about the things they care about in future one-on-one meetings.



Here are a few questions to help you get started:

- How are you? How is life outside of work?
- How do you feel your work/life balance is right now?
- What's your rhythm? (A great lesson from Marissa Mayer)
- What's one thing we could change about work for you that would improve your personal life?

- If around a holiday: Do you celebrate [Holiday]? How was it?
- If they have children: How is [name of child] doing?
- What do you like to do in your free time? What are your hobbies?
- What did you do for fun in the past that you haven't had as much time for lately?
- What drives you? What motivates you to come to work each day?

Questions for Improving Your Team

The beauty of one on ones are their flexibility. You suddenly have this block of time on your calendar to talk about anything with your team member.

One of the surprisingly valuable ways is to talk about how to improve your team or the company; your team members often have priceless insights that can save you money and time or improve things in ways you'd never realize on your own. You'd find out about them if only you took the time to ask!

- How could we change our team meetings to be more effective?
- Do you feel over-worked, under-worked, or just the right workload?
- Do you feel like you're on the same page with the team?
- Are there any meetings or discussions you feel you should be a part of that you're not? Are you included in any you don't want to be a part of?
- Who would you like to work more often with? Why?

- What do you like most about working on our team?
- Do you help other members of the team? Do others help you when you need it?
- Are you uncomfortable giving any of your peer's constructive criticism?

If so, why?

- What's one thing we could do to improve our environment for the team?

Questions for Giving and Receiving Feedback

Given the privacy of a one on one, and the trust you're building with them in these meetings, it's an excellent time to discuss feedback.

This is true for both coaching them on an area they could improve and getting feedback from them. Either way, you'll have the opportunity to be candid with each other privately.

Here are some questions to help get the discussion started:

- How do you prefer to receive feedback?
- Do you feel you're getting enough feedback?



Why/why not?

- What's a recent situation you wish you handled differently? What would you change?
- What's an area of your work you want to improve?
- What aspect of your job would you like more help or coaching on?
- How many hours a day do you feel you're productive? How could we help you be more productive?

Remember to Get Feedback, Too!

Feedback is a two-way street. If you want to improve as a manager (and who doesn't have more to learn and work on?), then listening to your team's feedback for you is big, too.

- How can I better support you?
- What could I do as a manager to make your work easier?
- What aspects of your work would you like more or less direction from me?
- What would you like to know about me?
- What could I do to make you enjoy your work more?
- Is there a situation you'd like my help with?
- What have your past managers done that you'd like me to also do or not do?

Don't forget to also offer informal, in-the-moment effective feedback whenever you have a chance. As you interact with your direct reports, take time to acknowledge how they are doing rather than feeling the need to wait for a one-on-one. This way, they can always be confident in their performance and feel comfortable seeking feedback.

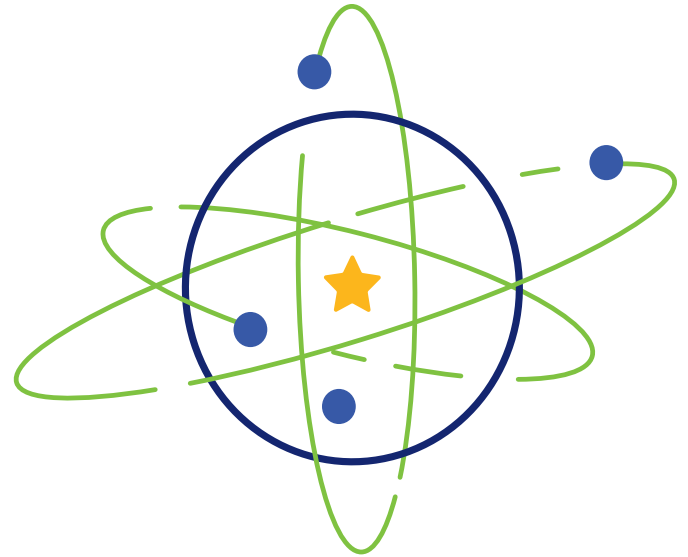
Questions for Talking About Career Development

One-on-one meetings are a great time to talk about their growth, because let's be honest, with everything going on, adding another meeting ad hoc to "talk about your career" falls into the "best intentions, but never happens" bucket. Instead, plan to discuss their career progression every 3-4 meetings.

But first, you need to establish what their goals and interests for growth are. These questions are a great place to start:

- What work are you doing here that you feel is most in line with your long term goals?
- As a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?
- What do you want to be doing in 3 years? 5 years? 10 years?

- What are your long term goals? Have you thought about them?
- Who do you really admire? Why? (People often admire those they want to become)
- What do you want to do in your next job?
- Do you feel challenged at work? Are you learning new things?
- What area of the company would you like to learn more about?
- What skills would you like to develop right now?
- Who in the company would you like to learn from? What do you want to learn?
- What additional training or education would you like?
- Are there any roles in the company you'd like to learn more about?



Here are some questions to ask to make sure you're making progress on their growth & development:

- Do you feel like you're making progress on your big goals here? Why or why not?
- What's one thing we could do today to help you with your long term goals?
- Do you feel we're helping you advance your career at a pace you would like? Why or why not?
- What skills would you like to work on most right now?
- Are there any events or training you'd like to attend to help you grow your skills?

Sometimes you won't be able to make a lot of progress. Talking about why and setting the stage for what you can do in the future is a great way to keep them engaged anyways.

Questions for Remote Employees

If you're managing remote employees, you face a unique set of challenges. One of the greatest of which is keeping communication clear and healthy.

Unfortunately, because so much of remote employee communication is via text (chat or email), you can't read the non-verbal signals you'd notice in your team members in an office with you.

These non-verbal signals are vital for helping us interpret meaning and intent. The result is that misunderstanding can arise more easily.

Use these one on one meeting questions to help you build rapport with remote employees and identify potential issues to work with them to resolve.

- What's your favorite part about working remote? (Understand what drives them)
- How long have you been working remotely? What were the most challenging and surprising things when you first started?
- What helps you feel connected to others and counteract the potential loneliness of working remotely?
- What do you do to recharge each day?
- What's your setup like for working? Is there anything you feel you're missing?
- Do you feel the company supports remote staff effectively? How could we improve?



- How well do you feel you know your co-workers?
- Do you feel like you have opportunities for “water cooler” type discussions with the team to help you spur on ideas?
- Do you feel you could go to anyone asking them for help?
- What’s most challenging for you in your daily work routine?
- How do you manage distractions during the day? Is it a challenge for you?
- When you have a creative idea or epiphany, what do you do with it? (The kinds of things that would get openly discussed in an office could be missing!)

Questions for Skip Level Meetings for Senior Leaders

As Winston Churchill once said, “The difference between mere management and leadership is communication.” As a senior leader, this is particularly important, but can be increasingly difficult.

When you’re removed from the day-to-day, front-line work of the individual contributors in your organization, you miss out on a variety of insights that could improve your company and team.

That’s where skip level meetings come in. Skip level one-on-one meetings give you a way of keeping your finger on the pulse of all of your teams and gathering insights that can help you lead more effectively.

Use these skip level meeting questions to help you build rapport and trust with team members who may be intimidated by a senior leader like you:

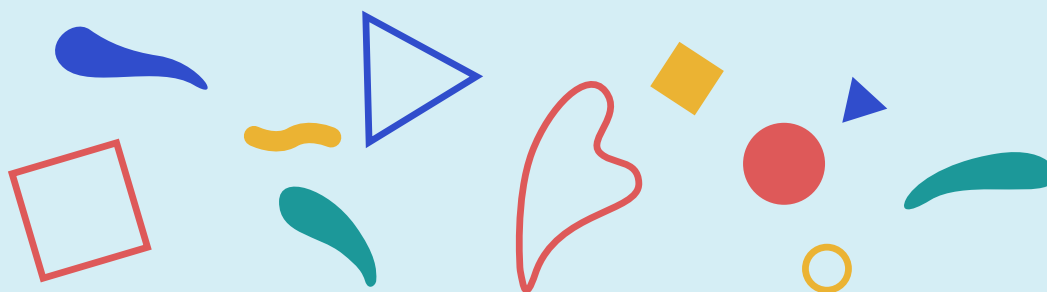
- What drives you? What motivates you to come to work each day?
- Where did you grow up? Where did you go to college?
- What’s your favorite part about living in [your city/town/region]?

- What's your favorite book you've read / podcast you've listened to / movie you saw recently?
- What made you decide to become a(n) [engineer/marketer/salesperson/customer success/role]?

These skip level questions are then great for obtaining valuable feedback to help you better coach and improve the managers that report to you:

- When was the last time you had a conversation with your manager about your career? How did it go?
- Are you happy with your career progress here? Why/why not?

- Do you feel your manager is approachable? Why/why not?
- How does your manager handle questions when you ask for help?
- What is a recent situation you feel like your manager did a great job?
- What is a recent situation you wish your manager handled differently?



And, lastly, use these skip level meeting questions to learn how effective your recognition and rewards program is, as well as learn who the star employees are in your organization.

- Has anyone gone above and beyond lately? What did they do?
- Do you feel we properly recognize people here? Why / why not?
- Who played a critical role in the success of [recent project x]? What did they do?
- What is the greatest strength of your team? Who personifies that best?

As a senior leader, you can't be everywhere all the time. By having occasional skip level one-on-one meetings with your team members further down the org chart from you, you can keep a pulse on how they and the managers they report to are doing.

Questions to Ask Every Time!

Who knew there was so much you could talk about in a one-on-one?! All of these meeting questions will help you build stronger relationships with your team members. However, a conversation should only be the start.

What's essential is you that you take action. Action is what leads to change and improvement. It's what starts the flywheel going to make these the mega valuable meeting they are.

This is why the 2 questions to ask in every single one-on-one meeting are:

- What can you do to take action or make progress on what we talked about today?
- What can I do to take action or make progress on what we talked about today?

By asking these questions, you're working together to make things better. It creates a psychological contract between the two of you to both keep your promises.

Then, when you get to your next one on one, you're both likely to see things are just a little better. It also reminds your team member that you really lis-ten, and when they have the courage to bring up issues, it leads to things happening.

That's how you build trust.

If you want a comprehensive view of how employees are experiencing your workplace and how you can maintain their trust, ask us about our employee survey and culture management platform – the same tool that helps Salesforce, DHL and Scotiabank become great places to work.



Learn more at www.greatplacetowork.ca