



ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS

OBJECTIVES:

- You and your direct reports have much better alignment in regards to the vision, mission, goals and objectives of the company. It isn't unusual for you to be on the mountaintop planting the flag and they are still crossing the stream at the bottom.
- You list on a sheet of paper what you want them to do, that is their job but focus on the "do" part. They list what they think they are to do. Compare sheets.
- They allow you to get a much clearer picture of how your direct reports think and solve problems. You want them to do it their way, you just want to understand what their way is.
- They provide quality time for coaching and mentoring your direct reports -- essential activities for building your management team. Often we invest in everything other than ourselves and our people.
- The most important objective is to build and maintain relationships. First come relationships, then results, not the other way around. This may be a tough one, if so, discuss with others you regard highly.

Look at your calendar. Where you spend your time tells you and others what you value. One-on-one meetings provide recognition for your direct reports. Giving your time and undivided attention sends the message that you value them.

Four-Steps

1. **Schedule your one-on-one meetings in "indelible ink".**

Schedule one hour per month of quality, protected time with each direct report. Set up the meetings six months to a year out and write them in indelible ink. During the one-on-ones, do not accept any phone calls or interruptions. If you don't schedule the one-on-ones, they won't happen. When you try to hold them on the fly, emergencies and normal daily distractions always win out.

2. **Work their agenda, not yours.**

As the price of admission for getting this quality time with you each month, each direct report must prepare an agenda for each meeting. If they aren't prepared, don't hold the session. Their agenda should:

- Contain four to eight items
- Focus at least 60 percent on strategy and long-term developmental issues (both for the company and for themselves)
- Contain at least one opportunity or stretch assignment

Remember to work *their* agenda, not yours. That doesn't mean you can't bring things up that need to be addressed. But you will get much better results by acting as a resource to

your direct reports, not by dominating the discussion or chewing them out for not doing things the way you want. Save your issues for a separate meeting.

3. **Listen, listen, listen.**

In the one-on-one, let the direct report do 80 percent of the talking. Visualize a very hot spot light on whoever is doing the talking. If it is on you too much you are in the hot seat. With an 80/20 split, the direct report will perceive the "air time" as just about equal. Ask 3 to 7 questions to understand their position, before you make a declarative statement. Oh, and none of your questions can "lead the witness."

Most executives have a very difficult time listening. They keep wanting to jump in and solve the problem. One good way to build trust is to admit you don't have the answers another is to draw out their gifts by listening to them. When you have talented people, your one-on-ones will challenge and stimulate you. If the meeting isn't stimulating, ask yourself what you can do differently next time, then ask them what they think would improve the vitality of the meeting.

4. **Create a development/action plan.**

Effective one-to-ones involve more than stimulating conversation. Each one should lead to mutually agreed-upon action steps, with deadlines, expected outcomes, and rewards if possible, or consequences if necessary. Write them down and review them at the next one-on-one.

Do not hold developmental one-on-ones more than once a month. When you meet too frequently, the one-on-ones tend to devolve to the tactical level. The shorter the time span, the more day-to-day and tactical the conversations become, which undercuts the purpose of developmental one-on-ones. This is where you get real clarity and focus with the key players on your management team. This is where you find out how they are leading their teams and how you can help them do a better job of it. To get the most value for you and your direct reports, keep the conversations at the strategic level as much as possible.