

every
woman

WORKBOOK

Making the most of your 1-2-1s

For managers



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ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

Established in 1999, everywoman advances women in business. Our aim is to ensure women from all over the world fulfil their potential. We produce workbooks on topics that matter most to our members, and we're constantly listening to your views to give you the tools you need to kick-start your career, at a time and place that suits you.

Business meetings get a bad reputation. One survey has calculated that the cost of unproductive meetings to US business is \$37 billion annually.¹ "Every minute you avoid spending in a meeting is a minute you can get real work done instead," insist the organisers of 'National Boycott a Meeting Day'.²

Small wonder, then, that so many managers neglect to hold 1-2-1s with their direct reports. There's every reason to dislike unproductive, inefficient and unplanned meetings that waste time and hold up to-do lists. But there is another way - one that can both save time and make the employee and manager more successful. Just look at the top reasons (table above) why most employees (89%) would like to meet their boss privately at least once per month.³

	% employees who desire this	% employees who experience this
Set goals	70%	36%
Review goals	73%	47%
Get performance feedback	6%	29%
Find solutions on problems	64%	50%
Solicit support	63%	49%

As a manager, you'll be relieved to know that in the employee version of this workbook we impress that the responsibility for preparing for and running a 1-2-1 falls to the direct report. After all, you have your own 1-2-1 to prepare for (you might want to take a look at the companion workbook for that very reason), and may well have multiple direct reports.

The purpose of this workbook is to arm you with the leadership skills you can develop to get the best out of your direct reports through your regular 1-2-1 conversations.

We'd love to know how you get on.

Share your experience with karenmax@everywoman.com. Good luck!

Maxine & Karen

The everywoman team

RE-THINKING THE BENEFITS

EXERCISE

In the table below, you'll find some of the common negative thoughts managers (and employees) have about 1-2-1s. In the central column, we have proposed some counter-arguments, and provided space for you to add in any thoughts of your own.

Some typical thoughts about 1-2-1s	Switching the thinking	Your thoughts
<p>"I don't have the time."</p>	<p>Communication between you and your employees is critical. If you don't have 1-2-1s, chances are you'll regularly interrupt one another on the fly and hold unfocused conversations.</p>	
<p>"I sit near my direct reports and we talk all the time so we don't need a 1-2-1."</p>	<p>A private chat is a chance to have an unguarded, uninterrupted conversation in which you can both be open and honest.</p>	
<p>"I don't need to hear a long list of everything my direct report is working on."</p>	<p>The 1-2-1 is a chance to ensure your employee is prioritising the right tasks. Status updates can be limited.</p>	

<p>“My direct report and I haven’t always seen eye to eye.”</p>	<p>The 1-2-1 is one of the best vehicles for building understanding between managers and employees.</p>	
<p>“I feel uncomfortable giving developmental feedback and my employee doesn’t respond well to it.”</p>	<p>Employees want constructive feedback and the 1-2-1 is a way you can practise delivering what is an essential leadership skill.</p>	
<p>“My direct report is already clear what their goals and measures of success are through the appraisal process.”</p>	<p>Monitoring progress towards goals throughout the year helps your employee be more successful, and makes it quicker and easier for you to prepare for the appraisal.</p>	
<p>“I feel I already have a good sense of what’s happening amongst the team.”</p>	<p>1-2-1s can provide a rich source of information about team successes which ultimately reflect well on you as the leader.</p>	
<p>“I hold team meetings when my direct reports need a collective morale boost.”</p>	<p>1-2-1s are an opportunity to reward and motivate your employees as individuals.</p>	

THE ISSUE OF TIME

“Ninety minutes of your time can enhance the quality of your subordinates’ work for two weeks, or for some, eighty-plus hours.”

Andy Grove, Former CEO, Intel

Of all the above issues, ‘lack of time’ might be the biggest one for you. Spend a few moments considering the impact on your calendar of an employee who is demotivated, focused on the wrong tasks, lacking in direction or developmental feedback and forced to interrupt you every time they have a question or need to relay some information.

Consider the following case study:

One morning Ella came into the office, switched on her computer and proceeded to collect her e-mail messages. She didn’t normally receive anything of much importance first thing, so she was rather surprised when an e-mail arrived from Graham, her manager, marked ‘personal’. She was even more surprised - in fact, shocked - when she read the e-mail: ‘Ella, I’m afraid it’s taking far too long for you to complete that project proposal I asked you to draw up next week. I’ve decided to hand the job over to someone else. You should get on with your normal work this morning.’

Ella almost cried out in dismay. ‘I don’t believe this,’ she thought. ‘How could he push me off the project just like that? Why didn’t he talk to me first?’

If you have experienced something like this, you’ll know there are many situations in which there is no substitute for a one-to-one meeting. Although other forms of communication have an important role to play in effective management, if you want to deliver a message to someone in an understanding way, and get their reactions and respond accordingly, you need to have a meeting.

Adapted from Communicating One-to-One at Work by Institute of Leadership & Management (Routledge: 2013).

So by getting the thinking right, it's possible that your 1-2-1 with your employee can:

- ✓ Encourage more transparency in your relationship
- ✓ Save time by having a dedicated period to talk
- ✓ Help ensure your employee is focussed on the right things
- ✓ Build more understanding between the two of you
- ✓ Develop your skills in offering feedback and mentorship
- ✓ Limit the amount of preparation time you have to invest in appraisals, and ensure your employee is ultimately more successful
- ✓ Help you uncover stories and data about team successes which you can take up the chain
- ✓ Make your task of keeping employees motivated a much easier one
- ✓ Demonstrate your commitment to your role as leader

“One-on-one meetings are the one common thread of all exceptional managers.”

Mark Horstman, Management Consultant

EXERCISE

In the table below, make a note of any specific ways in which establishing a productive and efficient 1-2-1 routine with your employee could benefit you personally.

Benefits of a 1-2-1	How these relate to me and my career
Encourage more transparency in your relationship	<i>e.g. I'll feel much more comfortable holding probing, in-depth conversations in a 1-2-1 situation.</i>
Save time by having a dedicated period to talk	<i>e.g. Fewer interruptions throughout the working day will mean I've more time to focus.</i>
Help ensure your employee is focussed on the right things	<i>e.g. I'll build greater trust of my team because I'll have more visibility of what they're working on.</i>
Build more understanding between the two of you	

Develop your skills in offering feedback and mentorship

Limit the amount of preparation time you have to invest in appraisals, and ensure your employee is ultimately more successful

Help you uncover stories and data about team successes which you can take up the chain

Make your task of keeping employees motivated a much easier one

Demonstrate your commitment to your role as leader

It's also worth taking some time to look at the 'Re-thinking the benefits' section of the employee version of this workbook, to discover the ways that a 1-2-1 routine can further benefit your direct reports.

LAYING THE GROUND RULES

Nearly seven out of ten (69%) employees acknowledge that the responsibility for creating the agenda for the 1-2-1 is theirs.⁴ We impress this in the employee version of this workbook and strongly suggest you do the same at the start of any new 1-2-1 process. It is important that the onus is on the employee to be in control of the 1-2-1, but just because you're putting control in your employee's hands, that doesn't mean you that can't have an input.

Demand an agenda. If a flimsy agenda is your biggest bugbear, you're not alone. "Why are we having this meeting?" is the first thing Joel Montgomery, Managing Director of Affiniti wants to know, while Julie Stevanja, CEO of Stylerunner, insists on "a summary of what they are looking for as the outcome". Guide your employee to the agenda template provided in the version of this workbook for direct reports, and agree on when this will be delivered each week.

Keep your own notes. Refer to the case study on the following page for an example of why manager note-keeping is so important. Keep a folder for each of your direct reports with dated notes. Digital tools like Evernote and Google Docs can be useful for this.

Request supporting materials. If part of your weekly agenda will involve a run-through of stats or detailed information, you might want to request this in advance so you can prepare your questions or thoughts, and don't waste time reading in the session itself.

Consider the longer term. Agree how often you'll look at formal goals, and how you'll keep track of progress. Ensure the employee takes responsibility for putting this on the agenda at agreed points.

Commit to actions. Our recommended agenda includes a space where your direct report can ask for help and resources. If you agree to any action points, ensure you follow these up.

Be flexible. What works for one employee might be different for another. Tailor the structure if you find it works better another way for individual employees.

Major problems don't wait. If something needs your urgent attention, your employee should feel comfortable interrupting you, rather than waiting until your next 1-2-1, by which point the issue might have spiralled out of control.

Safe environment. If you need to have a difficult chat with your employee, set up a separate session (see the everywomanNetwork workbook 'Handling tough conversations' under 'Further reading'). The 1-2-1 should be a safe and comfortable place where you can brainstorm and hold a two-way conversation - it's not the place for disciplinary action.

What other ground rules would you like to lay down for your employee 1-2-1s?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

The importance of keeping records

Lucinda Carney, CEO of Actus™ Software and winner of the Entrepreneur Award at the 2016 FDM everywoman in Technology Awards describes how a methodical approach to goal-setting and performance review is key.

“During the first part of my career I climbed the corporate ladder quite quickly and, as a result, was often in the position of managing people older than me.

I remember one individual I'd inherited who would appear sullen and resentful however hard I worked to build a relationship with him. The first lesson was to stop trying to get him to like me; instead, I had to play a straight bat and manage him as I would anyone else.

“It is such a simple concept to agree clear goals and then review progress against them, but too few managers make the time to do it well. In our 1-2-1s, I encouraged my employee to set objectives and I learned the power of asking open questions to challenge why he was consistently not delivering against them. At first I was understanding and offered my support, which he turned down. Eventually he left because he wasn't comfortable being held accountable. He even tried to raise a grievance against me - it wasn't upheld because I managed my whole team in the same way and had great documentation to back up everything I said.”

GIVING FEEDBACK

More than two-thirds of employees want regular feedback sessions with their bosses for the purpose of learning and growing. Yet only 29% receive feedback on a regular basis, and 36% never do.⁵ The 1-2-1 is the perfect forum for bosses to share developmental feedback that can really elevate an employee. But many managers shy away. As many as 50% of managers on the everywomanNetwork avoid giving feedback altogether, with 13% saying they find the prospect daunting.⁶

Perhaps you're mindful of hurting feelings. Maybe you're unsure of the right time to bring up mistakes and would rather wait until the annual performance review. Or it could be you've just never truly considered the importance of feedback delivered well.

EXERCISE

Think about three pieces of developmental feedback you've received in your career. How did it enable you to grow?

1.

2.

3.

If you're unsure how your direct report feels about receiving feedback, ask the question in your next 1-2-1. You can lay some ground rules around this too if it helps you both. For example, you might encourage the employee to come to each 1-2-1 with one highly specific area of their performance that they'd like some feedback on. This is something we encourage in the employee version of the 'Making the most of your 1-2-1s' workbook.

MODELS FOR DELIVERING FEEDBACK

1. THE 'BETTER NEXT TIME' REVIEW

If you get into the habit of conducting post-task wash-ups with your direct reports, giving feedback becomes routine. After any major project completion, hold a brainstorm with your employee in his or her 1-2-1 where you both put forward suggestions for what could work even better next time around.

EXERCISE

Thinking about a recent project that was completed, what could your employee do better in future?

1.

2.

3.

2. THE TRAFFIC LIGHT SYSTEM

By focusing on what you want someone to stop doing, continue doing or start doing, you focus your feedback into something more closely resembling an action plan. Studies have shown that an action plan is more likely to be well received and acted on by a direct report.

An example might look like this:

Stop: Saying “yes” to every non-urgent request from outside the department. I can see the added burden is causing you stress and you’ve occasionally been reluctant to take on more important work because you’ve been bogged down in other tasks.

Continue: Being a helpful colleague to whom colleagues flock for support. If you feel you should be doing something to help out, consider delegating or negotiating different terms which mean you can do the task in a way that works for you.

Start: Having the confidence to occasionally say “no”.

EXERCISE

Think about an issue your employee has raised recently. What stop, continue, start feedback can you offer?

STOP:

CONTINUE:

START:

3. THE DISC MODEL

Describe the situation in observable terms.

List the **i**mpacts.

Specify what needs to change.

Explain the **c**onsequences - positive and negative - of both doing so and failing to.

“This is a great tool to help you stay focused on the issue at hand and avoid being side tracked or waffling because you are uncomfortable,” says everywoman Associate Sara Parsons.

An example might look like this:

D: You have plenty of good ideas and perform well in regular team meetings, but when you're put in front of senior figures, you contribute very little and seldom speak up.

I: Senior figures within our organisation aren't getting to know you and therefore aren't recognising the contribution I know you are capable of making.

S: Commit to preparing some ideas and thoughts before the next senior management meeting, and make sure you get these across during the session. We can discuss these together beforehand if that would be helpful.

C: If you do this, I think the room will soon start to see you as a valued contributor. If you don't, I worry you'll be passed over for opportunities that come along.

EXERCISE

Highlight an area of your employee's performance that you'd like to see some change in. Use the DISC model to outline how you'd communicate this.

Describe:

Impacts:

Specify:

Consequences:

More tips for delivering great feedback

- ✓ As you become more adept at handling tricky conversations, don't be afraid to tweak the models so that they're relevant to the situation.
- ✓ Start the discussion by encouraging the person into the mindset that feedback will help them grow in their role.
- ✓ Remind yourself of this mindset when you find yourself thinking "This feedback isn't such a big deal". Avoid watering down the message in order to make yourself or the other person feel better about a mistake they've made.

- ✓ Ensure your feedback is built on solid observations rather than something you might have inferred about someone's behaviour. Don't rush into delivering feedback until you're sure what you have to say is factual rather than judgemental, and based on behaviours rather than personality traits. Sleep on it if necessary.
- ✓ Consider the emotions of the other person but not to the point of avoiding the conversation altogether. There might be times when feedback should be temporarily delayed (if the person is about to present, or there's a looming deadline or client meeting, for example), but don't sweep it under the carpet: find the right time.
- ✓ Think 'develop' not 'download'. In other words, don't store it all up for the annual review; if there's something you can tell someone that will help them improve, tell them now.
- ✓ Be specific. Ground the feedback in real examples, related to business outcomes and KPIs as far as possible.
- ✓ Strike the right balance. That doesn't mean you have to deliver glowing feedback to offset criticism, but do ensure you notice when someone's done something well - particularly if that's in response to earlier developmental feedback they've actioned.
- ✓ Make it actionable. Suggest ways they can improve and act on your feedback, as well as putting together a plan for how you'll monitor performance.
- ✓ Demonstrate that you're open to feedback. Managers need it too, and who better to provide an analysis of your leadership skills than the people you lead?

LISTENING SKILLS

Listening is one of the most underrated of all communication skills. Most people focus more on their delivery and presentation style over how they receive the words of others.

But, as *Communicate to Inspire* author Kevin Murray points out in our everywomanNetwork workbook 'Powerful workplace communication' (see 'Further reading'), sometimes "the most inspirational thing you can do is give people a darn good listening to".

We all know what it feels like to not be heard, to be misunderstood - either deliberately or unintentionally, not given a fair platform to air our views or be pre-judged, talked over or dismissed.

To hone our own listening skills is not just to elevate ourselves as great communicators, but also as leaders in the making. For what is a leader who does not listen to his or her customers, advisors or employees?

Give yourself an edge with these quick exercises designed to sharpen your listening skills.

The consequences of poor listening:

91% of everywomanNetwork members have given an instruction at work that was complied with incorrectly, inadequately or not at all.

75% experience having to explain themselves over and over again.

Source: *Powerful workplace communication: talking and listening webinar* (February 2015)

1. ASK POWERFUL QUESTIONS

Well-considered, insightful questions are perhaps the best indicator you can give to a speaker that you're listening.

EXERCISE

Imagine an employee has just completed a challenging and complex project. You want some insight into how they found the experience so in your 1-2-1 you ask "Did you enjoy the project or not?" Think about three questions you could have asked instead to encourage a broader discussion and gain more insight.

1.

2.

3.

2. PRACTISE ACTIVE LISTENING

What you hear when others speak has travelled through many unconscious filters before it reaches you.

EXERCISE

Write a short account of something that happened in the last week involving a colleague. Notice every time you add conjecture or colour that moves the story away from the facts.

3. LISTEN WITH YOUR EYES

In your next 1-2-1 make a conscious effort to focus all your senses on your direct report, noting what you discern about how they're feeling in response to your questions or the agenda points being discussed.

A WORD ABOUT DELEGATION

While your 1-2-1 should not be seen as an opportunity to offload your unwanted to-do list items onto your direct reports, the forum is an opportunity to delegate well. A 2013 executive coaching survey by Stanford University found that 37% of CEOs are actively trying to become better delegators.⁷ Leaders can't do everything by themselves, and by empowering your employees to take on stretch assignments, they have the opportunity to show their own leadership capabilities.

If you can answer 'true' to any of the following, you probably need to work on your delegation skills.

1. You are never completely satisfied with the deliverables of your employees
2. You are obsessed with details and take great satisfaction from correcting other people's work
3. You constantly want to know what everyone is working on
4. You expect to be copied in on everything
5. You work longer hours than the people who report to you.⁸

When you delegate a task, you're saving yourself some time. You undermine that principle if you use up all that time micromanaging the individual as they attempt to execute. The aim is not perfection, simply to allow someone to get on with it in their own way. Provide clear objectives, a deadline and a quality standard, and then step away with the assurance that you're there should any guidance be needed. If the task is particularly complex, agree to hold a status update at agreed points, but otherwise commit to butting out.

YOUR PERSONAL ACTION PLAN

1. Document your key motivations for creating a successful 1-2-1 process with each of your direct reports. In what ways will you benefit? In what ways will your employees benefit?

2. Think about a great 1-2-1 you've experienced in the past (your own or an employee's). Why did it work well and how can you incorporate those facets into the ground rules you'll establish with your employee?

3. What elements of giving feedback, listening and delegating have you identified as needing to work on? What will you do and by when?

4. How will you measure the effectiveness of your 1-2-1s? For example, noticing how employees appear at the end of sessions or soliciting direct feedback from them?

EVERYWOMAN EXPERTS

everywoman creates workbooks on topics that matter most to our Network members. We draw on member surveys and the latest thinking from the academic and business worlds, as well our own experiences as we navigate our careers. Each workbook offers practical advice, enabling tangible actions for your daily work lives ahead of those important performance reviews.



Maxine Benson MBE & Karen Gill MBE

Co-founders of everywoman, Karen and Max have spoken to thousands of women about the challenges they face at work. Through their own experiences of starting a business, they uncovered a real need for a network where female entrepreneurs and businesswomen could interact and share experiences. The everywomanNetwork, launched in 2013, serves as a truly global tool to enable members the world over to propel their careers and businesses through online membership.

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Any topics you'd like to see covered on the everywomanNetwork?

We'd love to hear from you: victoria@everywoman.com

FURTHER READING

everywomanNetwork Workbooks

[Giving and receiving feedback](#)

[Preparing for tough conversations](#)

[Developing leadership behaviours](#)

[Powerful workplace communication](#)

everywomanNetwork articles

[Busting the myths around emotional intelligence](#)

[Listen up: 5 exercises to develop your most important communication skill](#)

[Running appraisals: a guide for new managers](#)

ENDNOTES

1. <http://www.businessinsider.com/37-billion-is-lost-every-year-on-these-meeting-mistakes-2014-4?r=US&IR=T>
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3. *Are Employees' Needs Being Met by One-on-Ones? Survey Says "NO"* by Drea Zigarmi, Jim Diehl, Dobie Houson, and David Witt (The Ken Blanchard Companies: 2013)
4. *Ibid*
5. *Ibid*
6. Poll conducted during the everywomanNetwork webinar: 'Giving great feedback' (October 2015)
7. <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/sites/gsb/files/publication-pdf/cgri-survey-2013-executive-coaching.pdf>
8. Adapted from: 'Delegate or relegate' by Kevin-James French (http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/business/business_comment/54638/delegate_or_relegate#.VZaV7etNvdI)

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