

# **THE NEW MANAGER SURVIVAL GUIDE**



**ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR LEADING  
A HAPPY AND SUCCESSFUL TEAM**

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# Talk to your people

## The biggest win as a manager

You probably haven't had regular 1on1s with your managers.

Me neither.

Even as a manager, I skipped them for far too long. Why? Because it's work. Depending on the number of your direct reports, it becomes time-consuming.

But as soon as I started them properly, I noticed the power of the 1on1. If you do it right, it solves many of the problems you have as a manager. It's not a silver bullet, but it comes close.

It gives you a chance to build genuine relationships with your directs.

It allows you to stay in touch and sync at least once every week.

It gives you the chance to check in on how your direct report feels.

It makes sure topics don't pile up over a month.

These issues are solved with about 30 minutes per direct each week.

If that's not a good deal for you, I cannot help you.

## How to get started

Before you can have 1on1s, you need to schedule them. Scheduling them at the same time every week is important. It shows your team members that you value them and gives both of you a fixed time slot.

A good 1on1 takes 30 minutes; still, I like to plan one hour. This allows for margin in my calendar and gives some extra time when needed.

Share your free time slots with all of your directs and let them choose when it fits them. And send more time slots than you have direct reports; otherwise, the last one maybe has to pick the worst time slot.

After having a time slot for everybody, send out the invitations. Use your words in the invite to describe that you are now starting 1on1s and why you are starting them.

For some directs, it may seem counter-intuitive and like another 30 minutes weekly when they are not “getting things done”.

Make sure your team member understands that this is the time to discuss topics that bother them in their day-to-day work.

Don't overthink the invite.

When it's time to have the first 1on1, also plan some extra room for going through why the 1on1 is important.

## **How are you?**

You understood why to have a 1on1.

You have scheduled it.

Now it's time to have the first one.

The 1on1 always starts with a simple question: *How are you?*

Why not dive head-first into the current projects or the agenda? You are here to build a relationship and to pick up your direct report where they are. This question is chosen intentionally, as it can unfold in many ways.

If everything is fine, you will know soon.

If your teammate wants to blow off some steam – sometimes you need to – this question lets them do that.

If there is a disaster coming up, this question sets a good start.

This guide is too short to handle a full-blown disaster. But what always helps is to listen.

Don't throw in unasked advice.

Don't do anything apart from actively listening and asking your direct report to continue. Even if you cannot solve the issue right now, simply listening and offering an open ear will improve the situation.

This question also offers a great way to learn more about each other. People usually don't stop at work stuff.

Maybe it won't happen in the first few 1on1s. After a while, you and your teammate warm up and also talk more about personal stuff. This only works if both of you are willing to share something.

Don't worry; you can and should show that you are a human as well and share your struggles.

You will learn about topics that you can use later to reengage with your report. Let's say they are building a house or becoming a parent. Pick this up and ask questions about these topics in the next 1on1.

**Hint:** You can use any variation of "How are you?" that comes to your mind. It must be an open question, and you show genuine interest in the answer. For English native speakers, "How are you" often is more a cliché than an honest question. Some ideas to mix it up:

- What's up?
- What's on your mind?
- How is your week going so far?
- How is it going?

## **A system - not an agenda**

Now that we know how it goes for our direct report, it's time to talk about the "work" topics. Probably the agenda you were looking for.

But as you noticed, there is no agenda. That's intentional.

If the meeting had a fixed agenda every time, it couldn't unfold the way it does now. You want to avoid having the agenda point called **How are you?**

Instead, we focus on a system here, which consists of three parts:

- Personal
- Theirs
- Yours

The **Personal** part was the question and the chat following the "How are you" question.

Now, the second and third parts come from a crowdsourced agenda. Even when the crowd only consists of you and your direct report, I like to have a way to store these points.

You can use a shared document where both of you can note topics, or you can use a Slack channel, as I have described [here](#).

The format itself is not relevant, but the practice is. For the first few meetings, you have to remind and encourage your direct report to bring topics and put them on the list, but they will get used to it.

And then in the 1on1 itself, you go through **Theirs** and then through **Yours**.

Point by point. That's the whole idea.

## Take notes

If it's a task that you take with you - takes notes. Your direct reports tell you how they feel - take notes. Or you get information about a project - you guessed it, **take notes**.

When you have a lot of 1on1s, this helps you stay on top. It makes it easier to process the 1on1s and be able to answer questions.