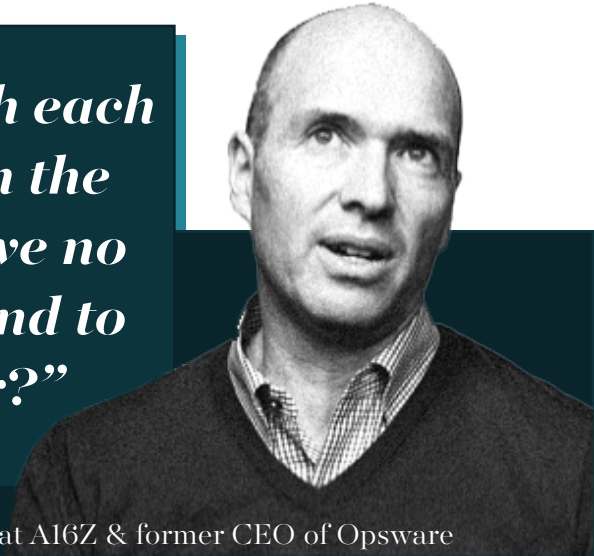


10 Steps to having amazing One on Ones with your team



“If Tim doesn’t meet with each one of his employees in the next 24 hours, I will have no choice but to fire him and to fire you. Are we clear?”

- Ben Horowitz, investor at AI6Z & former CEO of Opsware



In his book, *The Hard Thing About Hard Things*, Ben Horowitz tells the story of one manager who hadn’t had one on ones with his team in more than six months.

His reaction? Outrage. He was ready to fire Tim and Tim’s manager.

Why would Ben Horowitz fire multiple people over not having one on ones? Because they’re that important.

If you want to build a great company or team, you need one on ones.

Andy Grove, legendary leadership author and former CEO of Intel, does, too.

And many of today’s best companies including HubSpot, Salesforce, and Yelp, all believe in their value.

But setting aside time on your calendar for one on ones is not enough. What you do with that time is as important as having them.

Today, we’re going to show you how to have awesome one on ones just like today’s best business leaders who swear by them as a tool to improve communication with their employees, motivate teams, and increase employee retention.

Why One on Ones Matter

In Gallup’s comprehensive 2015 study, *The State of the American Manager*, they found a harsh truth: 50% of Americans have left a job to “get away from their manager at some point in their career.” Another Gallup study on employee engagement showed that managers account for at least 70% of the variance in employee engagement.

Open lines of communication make all the difference.

You should never be surprised by a team member leaving your team. There are always warning signs and opportunities to have fixed things along the way. Unfortunately, those problems are easy to miss, especially if your team is uncomfortable discussing them with you.



As Gallup’s research shows to the right, your team’s trust in coming to you is essential to their engagement at work.

50% of Americans have left a job to “get away from their manager at some point in their career.”

If a team member doesn’t feel comfortable talking to their manager, you can see that there’s almost no chance they’re engaged.

The problem? Everyone’s afraid to communicate.

Not only are many disengaged employees afraid to come to their managers, many managers are afraid to talk to their teams.

A study of managers by Interact Studio and Harris Poll revealed that the fear goes both ways; 69% of managers are just as afraid of communication as their teams.

————— *see chart on page 3*

If both sides are afraid to have tough conversations, they’re never going to happen. You must have the courage and confidence to communicate with your team.

One on Ones Are the Answer.

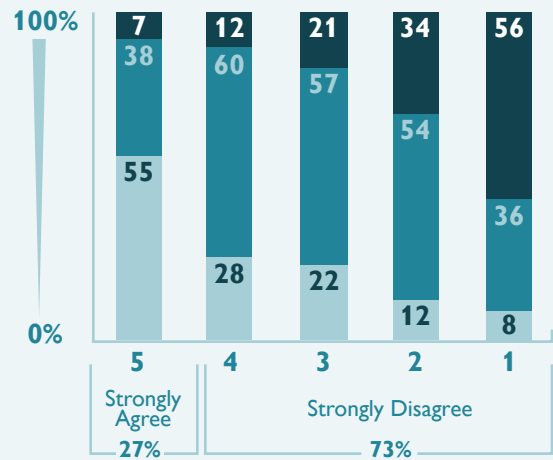
You build strong lines of communication with your team by making them a priority. The best way to prioritize communication is to schedule regular time for it, and one on one meetings are a great place to begin.

In this eBook, we’ll provide you with 10 steps to help you improve your one on one meetings if you’re already having them, or help you start having awesome one on ones with your team today.

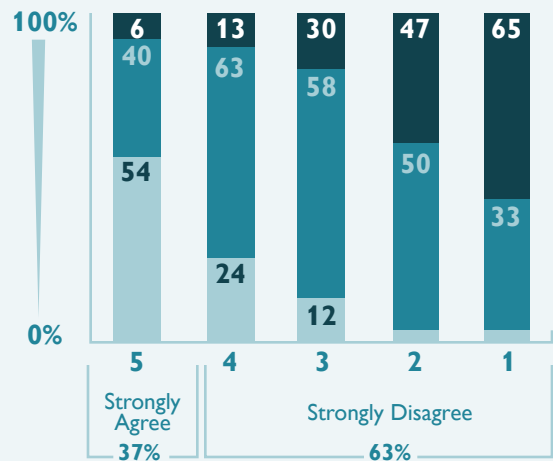
Let’s dive in.

Employees Whose Managers Are Open and Approachable Are More Engaged

I feel I can talk with my manager about nonwork-related issues.



I feel I can approach with my manager with any type of question.



Legend: Actively Disengaged (Dark Blue), Not Engaged (Medium Blue), Engaged (Light Blue)

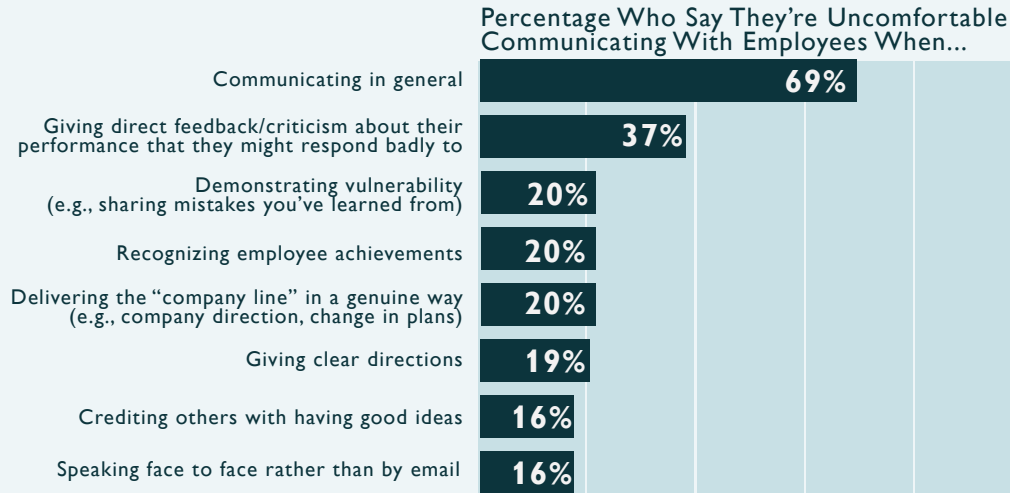
Source: Gallup’s 2015 State of the American Manager study

Read more about Gallup’s study on the State of the American Manager on the Lighthouse blog.

[Read More](#)



Managers are Uncomfortable Communicating



Source: Interact survey of 616 managers conducted by Harris Poll

Step #1: Set the Right Schedule

You need to have a one on one with all of your team members. The topics you discuss may change, but setting aside time for each of them is crucial.

While in an ideal world, you would meet weekly or biweekly with everyone on your team, that doesn't always work. Rather than a one-size-fits-none approach, use these as guideposts to determine how often to meet with each person:

Size of Your Team - If you have less than five team members, you should be meeting weekly with everyone. If your team is bigger than that, you may need to meet less often, but realize there will be more ground to cover each time.

Specifically, you should never go more than a month without meeting with anyone; too much can happen in a month to not check in. Especially if you meet less frequently, you should set aside a full hour to meet. You can always end early, but you never want to hear a zinger and have another meeting to run to.

Task Relevant Maturity - This is the most important factor. If someone is new in a role, or has a new responsibility, they need more help.

Make time weekly to meet with those on your team that are newly hired, recently promoted, or placed in a new role. Do this even if everyone else only has biweekly or monthly one on one meetings.

Adjust Your Management Style to Their Task Level Maturity (TRM):

TRM of Subordinate:	Effective Management Style
Low	Structured; task-oriented; tell what, when, and how.
Medium	Individual-oriented; emphasis on two way communication, support, mutual reasoning.
High	Involvement by manager minimal: establishing objectives and monitoring.

Source: Andy Grove, High Output Management

Learn more about Task Relevant Maturity on the Lighthouse blog.

[Read More](#)



Adjust the frequency of meetings for each person as their roles, responsibilities, and comfort levels change to ensure everyone has the support they need to succeed and thrive

Your Schedule - Unless you have an unusually tough schedule, you should meet on a regular cadence with everyone on your team, every one to two weeks. Try to make it the same time and day so you can build a rhythm and both anticipate the meeting.

If you travel a lot, do the best you can. Make up for a lot of missed time by meeting for longer periods of time or more frequently between trips. Otherwise, you risk losing touch with your team and getting blindsided by big problems or a costly departure. A focused one on one by phone in an airport terminal is better than not talking for two months.

All in all, the key to scheduling with one on ones comes down to these things:

- Pick a schedule that makes sense for your team member's role and responsibilities.
- Mark it in your calendars so you both can plan for it.
- Create consistency by setting a schedule you can truly commit to.

Step #2: Let Your Team Know

A sudden meeting invite for a one on one meeting could be scary to your team members if they aren't expecting it. You want them to be excited about the meeting—not discouraged or afraid. The best way to accomplish this is to be clear with them what your goals are for the one on one meeting and how it will work:

Tell Them What to Expect - Make it clear what the meeting is for. Explain that it's a meeting for them to talk about what's on their mind, give them coaching, share feedback both ways, and talk about their career development. This will remove any doubts or fears about them being in trouble or anything.

If you want a handy template you can use, try something like this:

Hi [Name],

I'm going to start doing one on ones with you and other members of the team. This is to get more feedback from you as well as give you a place we can talk about anything that's bothering you, your career development, and more.

To start, we'll have the first one on [Date] at [Time]. We can then talk about a time that we can stick to regularly afterwards.

If you want to learn more about what to expect, this post can help you: <https://getlighthouse.com/blog/one-on-ones-employee-know/>

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Thanks,
[Your Name]

At their core, one on ones are about improving communication with your team. To start the first meeting off well, be sure to communicate why you're starting one on ones with them.

Step #3: Create Agendas

Whether you're just starting out, or have been doing one on ones for some time, planning ahead with an agenda can have a big impact. You want to make the most of the 30-60 minutes you have for each of your team members and thinking about what you want to discuss in advance always helps.

Have Them Drive the Agenda - In his book *High Output Management*, Andy Grove stresses how key it is to have employees help set the agenda for one on ones when he wrote, "*The most important criterion governing matters to be talked about is that they be issues that preoccupy and nag the subordinate.*"

Learn how create a great one on one agenda on the Lighthouse blog.

[Read More](#)



After all, this is their meeting. It only makes sense to ask them to bring the most important things that are on their minds to their one on ones! To make sure that happens, ask them to send you an outline of what they want to discuss. If they come to you mid-week with something they would like to discuss and you can't handle it in the moment, encourage them to "add it to the agenda."

Looking for help with this? Lighthouse can help remind your team to set their agendas each week, and give you easy access to it along with your own place for private notes.

Don't Let Things Slip - Meetings and management go hand in hand, so it's really easy to get buried in them and feel as though one blurs into the next. By having an agenda for each of your one on one meetings, you can ensure that you sit down knowing what you'll be covering.

You and your employee's time is valuable. If you've made the decision to invest in one on ones, it's worth it to take the time to make them as effective as possible. One of the best ways to do this is with a clear agenda to guide the conversation each time. Encourage your team members to bring topics, and have a few of your own ready.

Step #4: Get Beyond the Status Update

What questions do you bring to your one on ones? If you're like many managers, they may be similar to these:

- What did you do last week?
- What are you doing this week?
- What are you doing next week?
- What's the status of that project?

While this is all good to know, it's not what one on ones are for. Instead, spark a healthy, productive conversation with these kinds of questions:

Questions to Talk About Their Goals

Long term goals are all about who they want to become. People are happiest when they feel like they're making progress on their big life goals. Try questions like:

- What do you want to be doing in five years? 10 years? Three years?
- Do you feel like you're making progress on your big goals here? Why or why not?
- Who do you really admire? Why? (*People often admire those they want to become.*)

These questions will help you make sure your people are progressing in the areas that matter most to them.

Questions About Company Improvement

Asking questions about improving the company during one on one time can help uncover what people in the trenches are seeing and get great ideas to improve the company. Try questions like:

- What is the company not doing today that we should do to better compete in the market?
- How could we change our team meetings to be more effective?
- If you were CEO, what's the first thing you'd change?

You may not always like the answers you hear when you dig in for feedback like this, but that's the point. Take action on the things you can change, and help your reports understand why some other things are the way they are. By doing so, you can relieve a lot of frustration and make your people feel heard.

Questions About Team Relations

Your team spends eight or more hours a day working together—more than they spend with friends, family and significant others. One of the biggest opportunities for improvement in productivity comes from improving relationships between teammates. Questions like these help uncover problems and opportunities to help every person become a better team member.

- Do you feel your ideas are heard by the team and I?
- How would you describe the work environment on the team? Is it more competitive or collaborative?
- Who on the team do you have the most difficulty working with? Why?



One on ones are a great time to coach people on issues they're having with coworkers. You can also use it as an opportunity to uncover problems on the team before they blow up into a big deal.

Good questions are a key part of making the most of your one on ones. The right question can uncover a key problem, or awesome opportunity you'd never hear any other way.

Looking for more good questions? Lighthouse can help you always have the right question to ask. We have over 100 questions to help you spark the conversation and build stronger relationships with your team members, whether it's questions about your employee's goals, the company, the team, or anything else.

Step #5: Get the Fundamentals Right

How often to meet with each person on your team, and what you'll be talking about, you need to focus on the fundamentals. Here are a few tips to get those right:

Meeting Length: One hour - These meetings are more than a *"quick check in."* If you really want to get the full value out of one on ones you need time to dig into topics. Set aside an hour. Ending early is much easier than trying to stay when you have another meeting on the calendar to head to.

Reschedule, Don't Cancel - It can be tempting to cancel for a number of reasons, but that does more harm than good. They may say canceling is okay, but that's more of a power dynamic you have over them than them not having something to talk about. If you must cancel, show your team you value the time by rescheduling to a new time soon.

Go Somewhere Private - They're called one on one meetings, not group meetings. If you want to discuss some of the stickier issues that come up at work, they need to be private. Heading to a conference room away from your desks, going for a walk, visiting a coffee shop, or getting lunch together are all viable options. If you're managing someone remote, then make sure you're in a private area for the call, too.

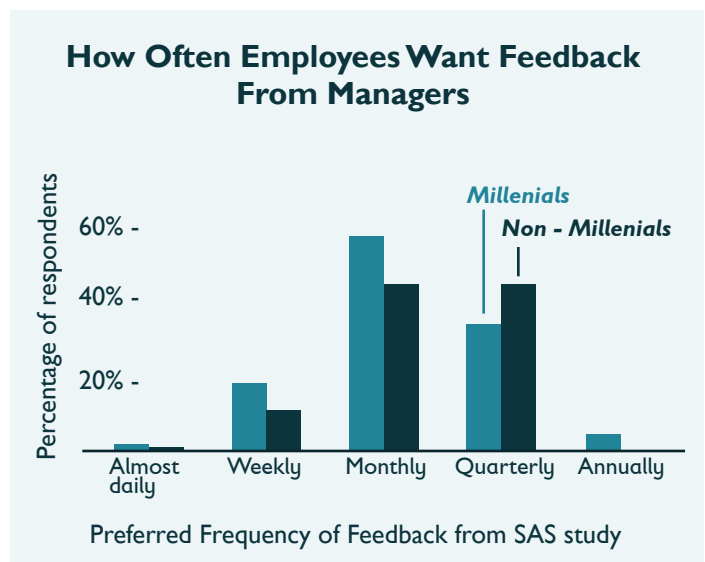
A key part of great one on ones is building trust with your team. They must feel comfortable before they'll open up to you and be candid. Where, when, and how often you choose to meet all determine how well you'll build that initial trust.

Step #6: Give Feedback

Not micro-managing and communicating sufficiently are two very different things. If you're not soliciting feedback and giving feedback regularly, there's a lot you don't know. And as a manager, what you don't know can really hurt you.

Remember: Millennials *Really* Want Feedback - A study from SAS found that the majority of Millennials want feedback at least monthly, and many want feedback even more frequently.

This becomes even more important given that 2015 marked the year that Millennials became more than 50% of the total workforce. Not managing in a way that works for Millennials would be devastating to your company.



Give Specific Feedback - *"Good job"* or *"You did that poorly"* are both equally lacking in value to the team member you give that feedback to. You must be specific in your feedback. If you didn't like your marketing manager's blog post, explain specifically why.



Was it how it was structured? Were there grammatical errors? Did it not resonate with the target audience? Take an extra minute to really understand what you want to have change or that you'd like to see more of. Share that with your team member.

Give Praise Regularly - A Gallup study found that more than two-thirds of employees do not receive any praise in a given week. The research also showed that getting *"praise or recognition for good work"* increased revenue and productivity 10% to 20%. Meanwhile, employees who felt unrecognized were three times more likely to quit in the next year. Not giving enough praise can be expensive!

Employees want to know how they're doing. Be proactive about offering feedback during your one on ones. It's a great time to dig into examples and what you want to see more or less of going forward. Consider adding this as a conversation topic or agenda item for each meeting.

Feedback and praise are critical elements of a healthy working relationship with each of your team members. Your one on ones are a great time to give them both.

Step #7: Talk About Their Growth & Development

One of the most motivating and transformational conversations you can have with your people is about their career goals. And when we say career goals we mean their goals; not company KPIs or OKRs, the next core project, nor any of your pet projects.

When you tap into someone's core drive and interests, you unleash their greatest motivations on the job. They'll even do much of the work on their own time.

Here is how to tap into this benefit through your one on ones:

Show Them Their Career Success Matters - Make it a conversation topic in your one on ones to show their growth is important to you. By then converting this into actions you take together, you tap into

a strong drive inside your people. Your reward for this is that they'll work harder for you, and be more likely to be open to what you ask of them.

Share Your Goals First - If they seem reluctant to share their goals, share yours first. It makes them more likely to open up after hearing from you. This is an example of the Reciprocity Principle.

If someone still isn't ready to talk about their goals, don't force it. Help those on your team ready to discuss it and revisit this discussion from time to time. If they see others on their team growing with your help, they may come around later.

Make Regular Progress - Stanford Ph.D and Harvard Professor Teresa Amabile authored groundbreaking research on what motivates employees, coining it *"The Progress Principle."* In simplest terms, she discovered: *"Of all the things that can boost emotions, motivation, and perceptions during a workday, the single most important is making progress in meaningful work."*

Big, long-term goals can be intimidating. It can feel like you'll never get there. By making small, incremental progress on your people's career goals, you'll tap into *"The Progress Principle."* Take advantage of this great way for your team to be more motivated and engaged at work.

Every great manager would like to say to their team members, *"Let's find a time on the calendar to talk about your career."* But let's face it: It rarely happens. Instead, use your one on ones as a time already on your calendar to help grow your people regularly.

Step #8: Take Notes

No matter if your one on ones happen in Skype, Google Hangout, a conference room, or a coffee shop—you need to take notes.

Learn how to help your team achieve their career goals on the Lighthouse blog.

[Read More](#)



Why? Research shows when you take notes, your brain better organizes the information you're hearing, which helps more strongly fix the ideas in your memory.

Taking notes in your one on ones makes you significantly less likely you'll miss something important or get back to your desk and think, *"wait a second, what did they say about that?"* It can also help you spot patterns in your discussions: Are you talking about the same things a lot? Are things getting better, worse, or staying the same?

Keeping your promises and building a rhythm into your one on ones are essential. Taking notes is a key part of making sure that happens. You can't review notes before your next one on one if you haven't taken any.

Here are a few battle-tested approaches veteran managers use to take notes you can try:

The Remote Split Screen - If you're managing a remote employee, have your one on ones via Google Hangout, Skype, or some other video conferencing option so you can see their face and read their emotions. The best way to take notes in that case is to then split part of your screen for the video and part to take notes while you talk.

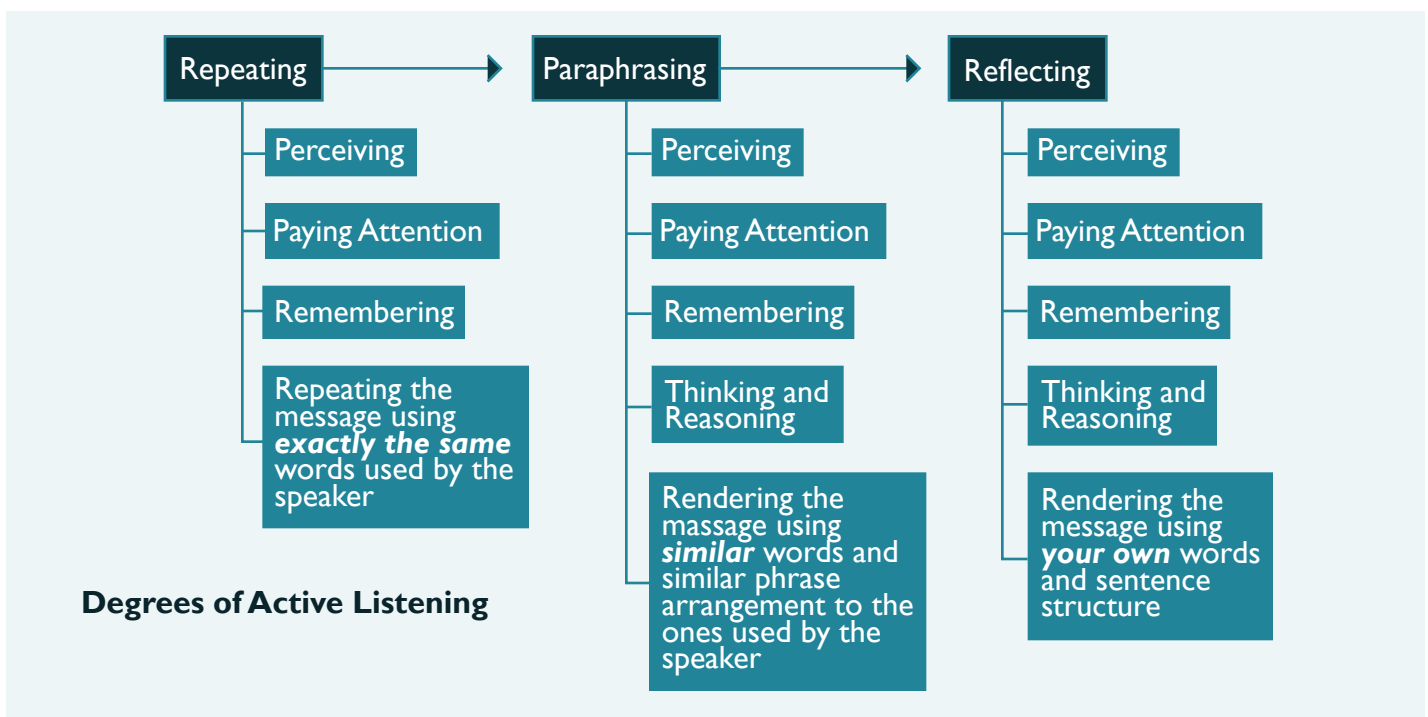
The Handwritten Notebook - Sometimes the oldest approaches are the best approaches. A simple pen and notebook doesn't create the barrier a laptop screen can. Also, any time you are taking notes in a notebook, there is zero doubt what you're doing—no texting, no email, no Facebook, no funny business.

Unfortunately, all of the benefits of electronic note taking (available anywhere, easy reminders, etc) are lost and you're at the mercy of your own discipline to look back at the notepad.

Taking hand-written notes is fine and it works for plenty of managers. Just remember to transfer them to a computer afterwards so you can look back on them and get the full benefits of your one on one.

The Last Five Minutes Method - If you prefer to have as little technology between you and your team member as possible, while still taking notes electronically, this is your best bet. When you feel like the meeting is wrapping up (or you're almost out of time), open up your laptop and start taking notes.

As you record things, use your active listening skills to repeat back to them what you believe you heard that was important to them from the meeting.



By repeating back the notes you're taking, your team member can clarify anything they feel you may not have fully understood. It can also give them one last chance to think of anything else that was on their mind.

You never want to walk into a one on one having failed to keep your promises or forgotten what you talked about last time. That's a sure-fire way to lose your team's trust that you care about them and what you talk about in these meetings. Experiment with what works best for you. Avoid damaging the trust you've built with your team.

Step #9: Send a Follow Up

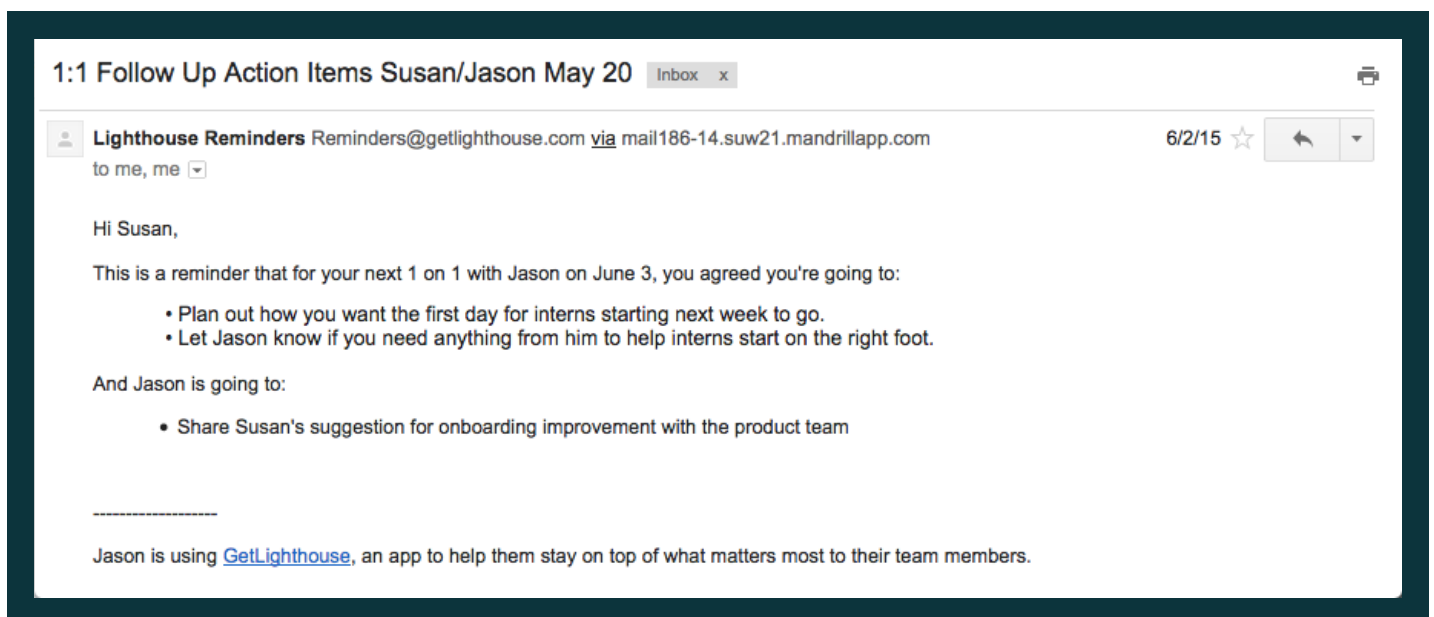
One on ones should end on a high note! Even if you cover some difficult topics, the goal of the meeting is to help resolve them and make things better for your team member. The best way to do that is to end each meeting by coming up with action items for both of you to make progress on and be accountable to for next time.

By setting actionable next steps, you are working together on solutions. This will help strengthen

your relationship with your team members by building trust that when they come to you with a problem, something is done. This avoids one on one meetings feeling like a broken record, always talking about the same thing and no progress being made.

Put the Follow Up in Writing - It's important to get next steps in writing. Whether it's taking action on their idea or being clear about a performance improvement issue (which needs to be documented for HR), it clarifies next steps, and creates a mutual agreement to make progress. Even better, research from Northwestern University professors Tsedal Neeley and Paul M. Leonardi shows that *"managers who were deliberately redundant moved their projects forward faster and more smoothly."*

Consistent follow ups keep both you and your team members accountable to making progress on what you discuss. Make the most of these meetings so your conversations aren't just endless talk without action.



An app like Lighthouse can help you keep track of your one on one notes and automatically send out a followup email with action items to you and your team.



Step #10: Keep Your Promises

If you're going to take the time to have one on ones, you should also commit to doing them well. Put in the effort to make the most of each one.

Be Prepared - Review notes from the previous meeting and bring questions to talk about with your team member. Consistency is key. Coming in ready to pick up where you left off builds their confidence in you and the value of the meetings.

Complete your Action Items - Review your action items from the previous meeting and make sure you do your part. If you keep your promises, they'll be more likely to complete theirs as well.

It also builds trust. The more your employees feel progress on what's important to them, the more they'll feel confident bringing up what's important to them in their one on ones.

Build Strong Habits and Routines - Simplify your one on one meetings by building regular habits:

- Make your one on one meetings recurring events on your calendar so they aren't getting bumped or missed.
- Take some time to review and prepare so you make the most of the time in the room with your team.
- Send a follow up so expectations are clear and they feel heard.

These habits will make it much easier for you and your team to get the maximum value out of your one on ones.

Wish there was an easier way to build these habits? Lighthouse can help automate much of this process for you:

- Sending you a helpful prep email or Slack message beforehand.
- Automatically send a follow up email for you (you can edit before sending).

- Remind your team to set an agenda you can easily view.
- Give you handy, insightful questions within reach mid-meeting.

Lighthouse also has much much more for your organization as you develop more leaders and need stronger oversight, clear documentation, team analytics and more.

Done well, the time you spend on one on one meetings can be some of the most enjoyable time you spend at work, and also the most beneficial for your team.

In the immortal words of the late Andy Grove: *"Ninety minutes of your time can enhance the quality of your subordinate's work for two weeks, or for some eighty-plus hours."*

To do anything well, it takes effort. One on one meetings with your team are no exception. However, with a little organization and good fundamentals, you can make the most of this crucial investment in your people.

Rather than rely on a self-made system or a paper and pencil, why not get all the benefits of software?

If you'd like help to build these kinds of habits and make the most of your one on ones without having to put in all the work yourself, then sign up for a free trial of Lighthouse.

Built with the best practices and research we've discussed today, Lighthouse helps you be the manager you've always wanted.



Not convinced? Here's what a few managers have said about us:



"I love Lighthouse! My one on ones have been transformed into deep, insightful conversations with my employees. I can't believe the world of difference it makes."

- Kennen Warmack, Director of Support at Medallia



"I didn't believe it was possible to set aside an hour a week to talk to my key people, until I started doing it and found it to be one of the most powerful management tactics I've ever seen."

- Zac Cramer, CEO of IT Assurance



"Lighthouse saved me! :) The team is more motivated than ever to tackle everything in our way. I'm so grateful about your advice, your software and your blog, which are tremendous sources of inspiration for me."

- Ladislav de Toldi, CEO of Leka



"I had 2 team members that struggled, and I was able to use one on ones in Lighthouse to spot patterns of concern and then address in a clear manner, creating action items for improvement, and follow up in more frequent one on ones documenting improvement. And through this both team members improved and have excelled."

- Anna Brozek, Operations Director at Big Cartel

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