

LEVERAGING REGULAR ONLINE 1-2-1'S

Holding regular 1-2-1s are one of the strongest levers to engage your team and develop performance, whether working from home or in the office. Here's how to get the most from them.

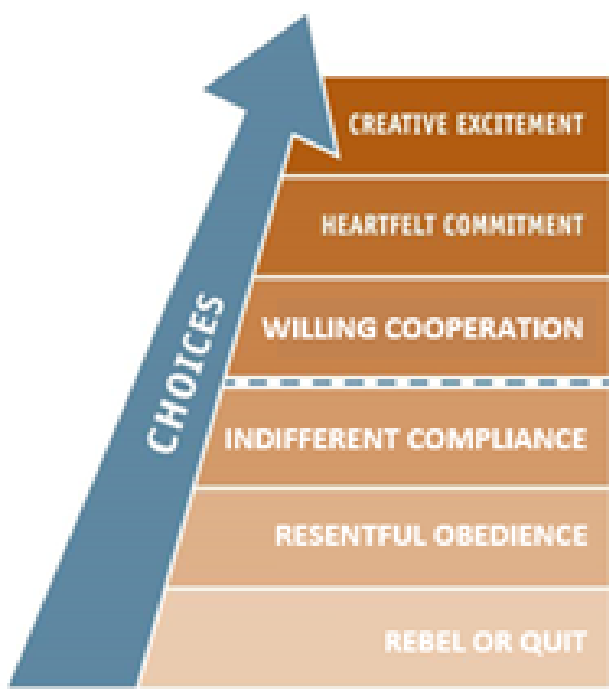
1 ADOPT A 1-2-1 MINDSET

A common 1-2-1 mindset is “I hold 1-2-1s to monitor people’s progress.” 1-2-1s can often end up purely as status updates, “What did you work on last week? What are you working on this week? Great. Next!”

But if they become standard, predictable meetings just to check people’s progress , we miss the opportunity to really engage our team members, and tap into their potential. An effective 1-2-1 mindset would be “I hold regular 1-2-1s to help team members get and stay engaged.”

“I think one of the dangers of a 1:2:1 is making it too prescriptive. I have a few things I ask my teams to look at but I also make clear that this time is to benefit them as much as me.” - Vicky Coleshill

2 LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT



Note the dotted line in the middle – it’s key.

Team members above the line are doing it because they want to, whilst those below are doing it because they have to. If people are operating below the line, you’ll have to tell what to do over and over, because they won’t do it on their own..

Its essential that as managers, we consider the conditions we are creating for a compelling work environment, and that goes just as much for homeworking as it does for in the office. Are you making it easy, engaging and actually enjoyable to get work done even under these current homeworking conditions?

When well planned and conducted, 1-2-1s are perhaps the best way to create the conditions for high engagement and ensure your team members are connected to you as their manager.

These 2 skills will help:

- #1 Prepare for your 1-2-1s
- #2 Coach during your 1-2-1s

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SKILL #1: PREPARE FOR YOUR 1-2-1S

- Begin with the end in mind – plan every aspect of what you want to discuss. As well as content, think about how do you want the team member to feel before, during and after the 1-2-1. Engaged? Motivated? Curious? Valued? Then align your behaviors to elicit those feelings.
- Schedule them in advance as recurring calendar appointments
- Reserve at least 30 minutes as its difficult to have a meaningful conversation in less time.
- Hold regularly - gold standard is weekly, perhaps even more in the current circumstances and stick to the date and time without moving if possible.
- Don't cancel unless absolutely necessary. Cancelling a 1-2-1 can be a huge withdrawal. It will be frighteningly easy to cancel the second, third and fourth 1-2-1 once you go down that path!
- Schedule 1-2-1s when your energy levels (physically and mentally) are normally at their highest. You'll never find the optimal time Consider your team members' energy levels too. You might want to rotate your meeting time if there's a conflict.
- Avoid scheduling 1-2-1s (or any meetings) back to back without a break
- Use video to increase engagement. Set the culture by encouraging all homeworkers to attend online meetings via video and modelling it yourself. Remember how lonely and disconnected some team members might feel, video can help address that. And you can gauge a lot by a person's body language
- Final note – only schedule what you can realistically commit to. Your frequency will be based on your day job, your number of direct reports, your other commitments and the demands of your own boss.

Prepare an agenda

- Collect your thoughts ahead of time and ask team member to do the same. Use a 1-2-1 meeting planner if that helps (contact L&D and we can provide an example which you can adapt to suit).
- Write down the key questions you want to ask and the points you want to cover and share them in advance. Ask your team members to do the same
- Remember the purpose of the meeting is to lift the engagement. Let them be part of creating the agenda and invite them to take the lead.
- Be realistic about priorities and put the most important items up front, including the issues that require the most conversation, assessment and brainstorming.

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Since our working environment has changed – I now have 1-2-1s twice weekly (this might reduce over time), this is more to check people are ok, not necessarily to focus on tasks every time. – Elena Beach

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SKILL #2: COACH DURING YOUR 1-2-1S

We're shifting our mindset from monitors of people to coaches of people.

- To coach well you need to be fully present, remove as many distractions as possible.
- Ask coaching questions that encourage reflection and invite team members to do the majority of the talking (contact L&D for a list of some coaching questions you can use)
- Listen with empathy - it requires you to suspend your own needs and check into someone else's, and to genuinely want to understand your team member's point of view.

- The essence of empathic listening is not that you agree or disagree with the other person, it's that you fully understand that person emotionally and intellectually.
- Don't interrupt
- Ask what you can do to support them or what resources you can provide and importantly follow - up on it! Deliver what you promise – does that phrase sound familiar?
- While listening is clearly essential, 1-2-1s also need you to share insights, ideas and frameworks to coach, support and develop your team member.

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Don't use all of the time for your own benefit to dish out tasks. This is their time too so allow for it. Use probing questions to ask how they are (and ask them again if you receive a stock answer). Ask what you can do to help them and then follow up on it. - Sarah Povey

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CREATE 1-2-1 COMMITMENTS AT THE END

- Coaching is more than asking questions and listening, it's keeping each other accountable for what you've discussed and taking action – summarise what the actions are, who will be doing what by when
- Review any actions from last 1-2-1. If they didn't complete the previous 1-2-1s commitments, then listen, understand the reason and coach your team member about how to move forward
- One of the ways you can help your team is by clearing the path – cutting through any red tape, connecting the team members with a contact, or getting a response from someone who's been unavailable. Ask “what can I do this week to support you” or “what resources can I provide?” and then get it done. Keeping your commitments is just as important as team members keeping theirs

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Most importantly for me is ask them what they need from me – how can I support them achieve what they want to.” - Nick Hodgson

Thank you to Nick Hodgson, Elena Beach, Sarah Povey, Imogen Yates, Sarah Devenish and Vicky Coleshill for contributing their ideas for this article.