

LEVEL 2: INTERPERSONAL

ONE-ON-ONE FOUNDATIONS QUICK REFERENCE

This is Their Meeting

One-on-ones aren't status updates or task check-ins (those belong in other forums). This is their time to talk about what matters to them: their growth, their challenges, their ideas, and how they're really doing. Your role is to listen, support, and help them move forward.

The 80/20 Rule: You should be listening 80% of the time and talking 20%. If you're doing most of the talking, you're missing the point.

Psychological Safety is the Foundation

Without psychological safety, nothing else works. People won't share what's really happening if they don't feel safe. Build trust by:

- **Being consistent:** Show up prepared and present every time
- **Responding without judgment:** Create space for honesty, even when it's uncomfortable
- **Following through:** If you commit to something, do it
- **Protecting confidentiality:** Don't share what's said unless there's a safety or ethical concern or you have permission
- **Celebrate progress and learning:** Recognize effort and courage, not just perfect outcomes. Mistakes are part of growth. Create space to learn from them without fear.

Key Mindsets

Development Over Status: Focus on growth, learning, and forward momentum (not just what got done this week).

Curiosity Over Judgment: Ask questions to understand, not to evaluate or fix. Let them do the thinking.

Their Agenda, Your Support: Let them set the direction. Your job is to help them clarify, explore, and act.

One-on-Ones and Performance Management

Performance management isn't just an annual review. It's continuous feedback and coaching throughout the year. Nothing in a performance review should be a surprise. If something shows up in a performance review that never came up in a one-on-one (or another conversation), something has gone wrong.

Use your one-on-ones to have ongoing conversations about what's working, what's not, and how to improve. That way, when it's time for a formal review, you're just summarizing what you've already been talking about.

Start With Alignment

If you're new to working with someone (or if things feel off), use one of your early one-on-ones to align on how you work together. Talk about:

- How you each prefer to communicate
- What good support looks like to each of you
- How you like to receive feedback or recognition
- How you each process information and make decisions
- What energizes or drains you

These conversations prevent so much friction down the road. Get aligned early, and revisit when things change or feel misaligned.

Types of One-on-One Conversations to Consider

Not every one-on-one needs to follow the same format. Depending on what your team member needs, you might focus on:

- **Engagement:** Understanding what energizes them and what might be getting in the way
- **Career Development:** Mapping growth and exploring future possibilities
- **Strengths-Based Development:** Leveraging what's already working
- **Wellbeing:** Creating space to share how they're really doing and what support they need
- **Feedback:** Sharing observations (both what's working and what could improve) in a way that supports growth
- **Project Debrief/Retrospective:** Learning from a sprint, milestone, or ship

How to Close Every One-on-One

End with clarity:

- What did we agree on? Recap key takeaways or decisions
- What's the next step? Be specific about who's doing what
- What do you need from me? Make your support tangible

Then follow through.