

## Go 1:1 with Your Directs

### *Spend Quality Time with Your Staff*

I spend most of my days helping leaders discover ways to be even more effective, and a lot of these conversations are about how they can use their time more productively (time being an executive's most precious resource). I start by asking how they spend their time today, which is a question that produces a wide variety of answers (and, not surprisingly, a lot of confusion and frustration). Eventually, we get around to two sets of meetings – regular staff meetings and 1:1's with their direct reports. Why? Because while these meetings take up space on the calendar, they can actually *save* executives time if they know how to leverage them. Almost every leader I meet does the staff meeting thing, although some do it better than others (see Chapter 51). But sometimes leaders look at me funny when I ask about 1:1's with direct reports, like it's something they've never considered.

Here's my bias - I believe all leaders should conduct regular 1:1 meetings with each of their direct reports. I recommend weekly, 1-hour meetings with each direct, but understand that some leaders with large numbers of direct reports may have to limit the sessions to 30 minutes or conduct them every other week (by the way, if you have more than 8 direct reports, you have too many; time to empower someone else to supervise some of these staff members). I further believe that leaders should consider the 1:1 a "sacred" part of their calendar – regular means regular; don't move 1:1's around or cancel them. Get into a rhythm and cadence of meeting with your direct reports on a set schedule; this tells team members that you value this time, and have prioritized it on your calendar.

Effective 1:1's start with a clear sense of what's going to be discussed. A simple process is all you need to build a productive agenda for the meeting. First, have your

direct report build a short list of topics they want to discuss (3-7 items). Review the list, add 1-2 items of your own, and return the list. That's it – two conversations or e-mails, and the agenda is set. Second, hold the meeting anywhere that's comfortable, but ensure that you'll both be free of distractions (go to their office once in awhile for a change of pace).

Once you begin, let your direct report drive the meeting; start by working down through their list of items, and remember to stay in coaching mode as much as possible (asking questions). The conversations will generally take one of three forms: the direct report is giving you an update (FYI), asking for your opinion (input), or seeking your approval (decision). Make sure you're clear on what they're trying to accomplish (in fact, it's a good idea to "train" them to clarify their intent for each topic on the list). After your direct report has worked her way through her list, it's your turn. You too, are seeking to accomplish one of three goals: providing an update on something (knowledge or awareness), asking questions to gather information (brainstorming or following up), or assigning tasks (delegation). Pretty simple, yes? A regularly structured conversation with each direct report, where you're discussing the most important items of a common agenda. Oh, and one more tip – be sure to save room to ask about their family, hobbies, special interests, etc. This is your time with your direct report... use that time to connect on a deeper level than just work.

So that's a simple formula for conducting an effective 1:1 – but how does this make *you* more productive? That's easy – how many times during the week do you take 15 or 20 minutes with each direct report to answer questions, help them stay on track with projects, give them an update, ask for information (fire drill style), and so on? Probably quite often. How many of these conversations could be accomplished in a well-planned, efficient 1:1 meeting? Most of them, frankly.

Just think of what you could be spending your time on as a leader if you dedicated 5-6 hours a week to a series of structured discussions with each direct report. You could spend more time walking around, for one – getting in touch with clients, customers, the

operations, your extended team, etc. You could spend more time thinking strategically, or partnering across the organization to break down barriers or facilitate relationships.

Obviously, you'll still see and/or talk with your direct reports throughout the week – this isn't about seeing them once and then ignoring them until the next 1:1 session. But by getting disciplined around a specific agenda, you'll help them chart their week ahead... providing the direction, guidance, support and coaching they need to move forward (most employees desperately want your undivided attention to focus on their work). Remember, employees are motivated by progress... moving the ball forward (especially if it's their agenda or project that is being advanced). That's what you're doing with the regular 1:1 – you're literally manufacturing “progress”, for you and your direct reports.

Believe me, 1:1's work, and they work on multiple levels. In fact, I believe they are *the* key enabler of five basic management tasks: relationship building, information gathering, delegation, follow-through, and idea exchange. If you're conducting regular, efficient 1:1's with each of your direct reports, good for you. If you're not, break out your calendar and give this technique a try. I'm confident you'll find these meetings to be productive *and* meaningful.



### *Spend Quality Time w/ Your Staff*

1. Commit to regular, weekly 1:1's with each of your direct reports
2. Let your direct reports drive the agenda, and remember to practice your coaching skills
3. Use this time to build stronger relationships with the people who make you look good as a leader