

7 Ways to Get

More out of 1-on-1s With Your Manager

This article is part of the Jhana® for Individuals solution by FranklinCovey.

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A New Reality

It's an all-too-common inclination to let your manager set the tone and agenda for 1-on-1s while you follow their lead. Hello, power dynamics!

But what happens—or doesn't happen—in your 1-on-1s can have a huge impact on your work-life balance, chances for advancement, productivity, happiness, and engagement. So it pays for you to take ownership of these critical meetings. These 7 tips from FranklinCovey's bite-size Jhana® for Individuals content will help you supercharge your 1-on-1s—and your career.



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1. Propose agenda items you care about.

Make your 1-on-1 memorable—for you and your manager.



You have one 1-on-1 meeting, but your manager has one with each direct report.

Even if your manager has historically driven your 1-on-1 conversations, it's worth proposing topics of your own. Plenty of managers want their direct reports to take more ownership of 1-on-1s. Think of it this way: You have one 1-on-1 meeting, but your manager has one with each direct report. To help them stay on top of your previous conversations and development goals—and make sure you get what you need—plan at least some of the discussion topics.

What should those topics be? Whatever will help you clear roadblocks, feel more motivated and engaged, learn or build a skill, and succeed in the short and long term. All those things will be good for your manager too.

Here is a list of some suggested topics to help keep your 1-on-1 on track:

- Your biggest challenges right now and how your manager can help.
- Your biggest opportunities and any ideas you have for next steps.
- Development areas you want to focus on and where your manager can clear the path.
- A new idea you haven't shared yet.
- Things your manager doesn't know but probably should, like a personal issue that's been taking up your attention.
- Feedback on your performance. (Be sure to give plenty of advance notice for this one and to be as specific as possible, because spontaneous feedback requests usually result in low-quality feedback.)

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2. Be proactive about raising difficult issues.

Stay assertive, but stay positive.



If you bring up a problem, bring a few potential solutions to help your manager see you're interested in solving the issue, not complaining about it.

You may have dozens of reasons for putting off discussing a tough issue: It could be uncomfortable. Your manager may have a negative reaction. You don't want to sound like a complainer. Even if you do bring up the difficult issue, it might not change anything. But one thing's for sure: If you don't say anything, the situation won't improve.

When you constructively share what you find frustrating, where you need guidance, or what's blocking you or hurting your performance, you're not complaining—you're giving your manager critical information they need to know.

For example, you might bring up issues like:

- "We've been so busy that I haven't had time to think about my own development. I'd really like to work on my client-conversation skills."
- "I think a colleague is blocking my progress."
- "I'm starting to get bored with this data project."
- "I get anxious when I give presentations and could use some help."
- "I'd really appreciate hearing more from you about your expectations to be sure I'm meeting them."
- "I feel like I'm in the dark about where projects stand in our department."
- If you're nervous or your message isn't coming out well in the moment, just add, "I feel like I'm not expressing this well," and do your best to clarify.

If you decide to bring up a problem, try to bring along a few potential solutions to discuss, so your manager sees that you're interested in solving the issue, not complaining about it. Finally, if you have positive feedback, share that too! That way, your manager will know what to do more of (and possibly prompt your company to do more of it too).

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3. Articulate next steps and action items.

What's discussed in a 1-on-1 shouldn't just stay in a 1-on-1.



Don't forget to add a "by when" to each task you both are committing to do.

Do you sometimes walk out of a 1-on-1 thinking, Well, that went in one ear and out the other or I wonder if my manager will do what I asked? It's easy over the course of a conversation to lose track of action items—or to forget requests as soon as a meeting's over.

To keep your manager (and yourself) more accountable, spell out specific next steps as you wrap up each topic in your 1-on-1.

If you aren't sure what those next steps should be, ask something like:

- "So, what should happen next?"
- "How can I move this forward?"
- "As a next step, should I…?"
- "As a next step, could you…?"

Don't forget to add a "by when" to each task you both are committing to.

You might end your 1-on-1 with each of you recapping your action items, or follow up after the meeting with the next steps via email to make sure you're both on the same page. Then start your next 1-on-1 by following up on the action items from last time.

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> The most important characteristic for career growth is insatiable curiosity. The minute you know it all, you're dead."

— Jennifer Colosimo
President, Enterprise Division

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4. Ask questions to learn contextual information that will help you in your job.

Help them help you.



Ask your manager to give you a view of how your projects and your team's work fit into the bigger picture of your organisation and industry.

If your manager is like most, they spend a huge chunk of time each week talking to other team members, peer managers, and higher-ups. These conversations give them a wider view of your projects and your team's work—and how it all fits into the bigger picture of your company and industry.

While your manager should be sharing this contextual information with you proactively, it can be easy for busy managers to forget or lose track of who should know what. Plus, managers aren't mind readers and might not be aware of exactly what you'd like to know or how it's relevant to your work.

So ask. What high-level information are you curious about or could help you see how your work contributes to larger goals? If you aren't quite sure what to ask, start with broader questions. For example:

- "Is there any important high-level information you've heard this week that could impact our team?"
- "Do you have any details on the executive offsite and how those discussions might shift our goals for next year?"
- "Have you heard any updates on the logistics project and when it might happen? Knowing that will help me set my schedule for next month."
- "I just read about X trend or development. How might that impact what we do?"

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5. Limit status updates.

Your 1-on-1 isn't like a social post.



Make sure you spend your 1-on-1 on the most meaningful issues, such as any challenges you're encountering.

Your manager needs to know what you're up to. But is relaying mundane task details really the best use of time when you have your manager's undivided attention?

One effective way to keep your manager in the loop and reserve 1-on-1 time for more important topics is to email your manager a status update in advance of your 1-on-1 meeting. This approach has the additional advantage of capturing important details in writing, which might make it easier for you both to track tasks and zero in on the most meaningful aspects in your 1-on-1s, such as any challenges you're encountering.

You can use a simple template like this one to give updates week after week:

Hi [Manager Name],

Here's my update for the week of [Date].

Biggest win: I completed____, which is important because .

My top 3 priorities this week are:

Task 1: [Status and Deadline]

Task 2: [Status and Deadline]

Task 3: [Status and Deadline]

What's standing in my way: I'm concerned about because____. I'm doing____to address this.

How you can help: If you could____by [Date], that would help me____. Please let me know if that isn't doable.

Thanks,
[Your Name]

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6. Don't cancel—and if your boss cancels, ask to reschedule.

Treat your window of time like a gift.



Cancelling can communicate to your boss that these meetings are not important to you. If something urgent comes up, reschedule the 1-on-1 for another time that same day.

Even if you're busy or don't have much to share, resist the urge to "gain back" time by cancelling your 1-on-1. Instead, could you use the time to learn what's going on in your manager's world—how they're feeling about the company, your team, or where things are headed in your industry? Or if you're really out of things to talk about, could you discuss how to make your 1-on-1s more productive going forward?

While it may be fine to miss a meeting occasionally if you or your boss is travelling or on vacation or an emergency comes up, be sure to ask to reschedule. It may help to include your reasoning in your ask. For example: "Hi Franklin, I hope you enjoy your long weekend. Could we reschedule our 1-on-1 for Tuesday? I could use some guidance as I map out the Gemini project, and I'd like to check in about the conference in Seattle next month."

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7. Set an agenda and stick to it.

Make the most of your time by making a plan.



When assembling your agenda, don't worry about phrasing. Simply jot down everything you'd like to discuss and then ask yourself, "What question or questions do I need answered?"

If you tend to run out of time, add approximate discussion times to each item on your agenda. In addition to keeping your conversation on track, adding the number of minutes you think each topic will take helps you prepare an agenda. An agenda geared to the amount of time you have gives you an opening to move things along to the topics you care most about if the two of you are lingering on another subject.

For example, you might say: "We had 10 minutes budgeted for this, and we're at 15 minutes now—should we move on? Or would you rather we stick with this discussion and talk about my development goals next time?"

When assembling your agenda, don't worry about phrasing. Simply jot down everything you'd like to discuss and then ask yourself, "What question or questions do I need answered?" Then add those questions to your agenda. If you're having trouble estimating how long the discussion of each question will take, ask yourself:

- How complicated is the question?
- How much debate or discussion is there likely to be?
- How long has it taken to answer this type of question in the past?

If you're short on time, save questions that don't need immediate answers for a later meeting.

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It's your meeting. Get the most out of it.

1-on-1s are all about helping you develop and be more successful. They're not status updates or gripe sessions. They are a chance for you to connect with your leader, share your challenges, receive coaching, solve problems, and get and give feedback.

There will always be elements of your job that you have no control over, but 1-on-1s are not one of them. These meetings can be one of the most impactful ways to boost your work-life balance, chances for advancement, productivity, happiness, and engagement.

By following these seven best practices, you will have more influence over the outcomes of these critical meetings and your professional development.

Introducing Jhana Bite-Size Performance Support

Jhana takes a unique, just-in-time approach to learning. Like a virtual mentor, it provides actionable tips and advice to help people increase their situational and emotional awareness and improve the human and professional skills required to thrive in today's dynamic workplace.

Learners build their skills over time—through practical everyday tips and advice delivered by "push" (a weekly email newsletter) and "pull" (a robust library of hundreds of articles, videos, and tools) accessed in the moment of need.

FranklinCovey provides leadership-development solutions to help individuals and leaders at all levels. Our world-class learning solutions—delivered Live-Online, On Demand, or Live In-Person—are designed to build exceptional leadership skills throughout your organisation.

To learn more, email us at info@franklincovey.co.nz, or visit franklincovey.co.nz.

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