



BONUS SECTION FOR  
REMOTE & HYBRID WORK

# The art of the **one on one** meeting *for* **Engineering Leaders**

The definitive guide to the best tool for managers  
with exclusive content for **engineering leaders**

WITH ADVICE FROM MANAGERS FROM



Google



Quora

Etsy



**FELLOW**

Foreword by tech leader Lara Hogan,  
author of *Resilient Management*

# Foreword

Trust is the underpinning of a team's overall health, and as managers, it's our responsibility to foster it.

Of course, each team is different; we and each of our teammates have unique needs, expectations, and contexts we bring to the table. This means that the work to foster trust begins with taking a step back to learn about each of our fellow teammates: their preferences, career goals, and approaches to work.

Over the last decade, I've had the honor of kicking off lots of new reporting relationships with engineers and engineering managers at companies like Etsy and Kickstarter. And through the course of that work, I've learned that one-on-one meetings are one of the most powerful tools managers have to develop trust. In a one-on-one, we can ask lots of questions, share and receive feedback, and learn how to best support this teammate (and our team overall). But there's still a lot of mystery around how to implement and leverage these meetings.

The art of the one-on-one meeting is a great resource for both new managers implementing one-on-ones for the first time and experienced leaders looking for a fresh perspective. It brings together hard-earned wisdom, giving you actionable tips and advice for having meaningful and effective meetings.

Once you read through the guide, be sure to check out the checklist at the end. You'll be on the path to having healthy, productive one-on-ones!



**Lara Hogan**

Author of *Resilient Management*

# Table of Contents

<a href="#"><u>Chapter 1</u></a>	7
The purpose of one-on-ones and why great engineering leaders have them	
<a href="#"><u>Chapter 2</u></a>	16
Setting yourself up for success during one-on-ones	
<a href="#"><u>Chapter 3</u></a>	25
Specially crafted templates and questions that will boost productivity	
<a href="#"><u>Chapter 4</u></a>	34
The secret skills that will make your one-on-one meetings 10x more effective	
<a href="#"><u>Chapter 5</u></a>	41
Bringing out the best in your team: Career conversations and feedback	
<a href="#"><u>Chapter 6</u></a>	48
The 10+ deadly sins to avoid in one-on-one meetings	
<a href="#"><u>Chapter 7</u></a>	56
Why engineering leaders are more productive with Fellow	
<a href="#"><u>Chapter 8</u></a>	63
Completing your engineering manager tool kit	

# The purpose of one-on-ones and why great engineering leaders have them

## 1.1 – What is a one-on-one meeting?

How engineers on your team feel about you (their boss) directly impacts their view on their roles, their day-to-day work, and your company.

It's a massive stereotype that engineers' logical and practical nature extend to their working relationships. The reality is that everyone—including engineers—craves meaningful connections at work and in their personal lives.

This is why one-on-ones are one of the most powerful yet misunderstood tools for engineering leaders.

### **What is the definition of a one-on-one meeting?**

A wise man once said that you don't build a business; you build people and then you build your business. Great engineering leaders know this to be true. Productive teams begin with productive meetings—this includes one-on-one meetings.

A traditional one-on-one meeting is a regular check-in between two people in an organization, typically a manager and an employee. This meeting is a time for a manager and their direct report to exchange feedback, review performance, check in on important projects, and above all else, build a healthy relationship.



One of the main benefits of one-on-one meetings is to establish a connection between two people.

One-on-one meetings are great opportunities to build motivation, coach, and help with career growth. It is also a great way to establish an environment where both parties can exchange insights and feedback.

[Hazim Macky](#), Vice President of Engineering at Coinme

## 1.2 – The benefits of one-on-one meetings for engineers

### 1. Boost employee productivity

One of the main benefits of one-on-one meetings is that they increase each employee's productivity, morale, and quality of work.

Each engineer on your team will have varying experience with time management and task prioritization. One-on-one meetings are an opportunity to help your engineers hone a variety of hard and soft skills so they can deliver effective results for the team.

One-on-ones boost employee productivity because they help you and your engineers stay in sync. These meetings are a chance for you to mentor your engineers so they feel motivated to perform to the best of their abilities!



**Michael Lopp,**  
Sr. Engineering  
Leader at Apple  
([Supermanagers](#),  
[episode #8](#))

“

One-on-one meetings are really important to me and I don't just want updates.

I want things of substance and I want to be able to have a conversation about what's going on. I usually have two or three things I focus on so it could be a debate or a discussion and if we don't have anything to discuss I'll fall back on conversation starters like your growth or the current disaster that I'm battling. Basically, just high bandwidth conversations that are strategic, not tactical. I can't imagine having a more important weekly meeting with my team because these one-on-ones allow us both to grow.

## 2. Foster positive work relationships and engage employees

When you prioritize frequent check-ins with your direct reports, you ensure each relationship you form with your engineers is built on a foundation of open communication. One-on-one meetings are a chance to have a positive impact on one another.

“

Try to make your employee feel like they are observed, heard, and appreciated in your one-on-one meetings. Ask questions and find areas where they might be experiencing some difficulties that you can help them with. It is an opportunity where you can have a positive impact on that one employee and the team.

[Hazim Macky](#), Vice President of Engineering at Coinme

These meetings belong to your direct reports. When you and your engineers take turns in the driver's seat, you create trust and mutual respect.

You interviewed your engineers for their respective roles at one time, but that doesn't mean you should stop trying to get to know them, their habits, and their goals. Think of one-on-ones as a chance to "interview" each other about matters that are important to you both!



“

Once they've decided what's important to them, you can focus on questions. How do you operate with feedback? What's the team strategy? How do you like to articulate these things?

**Cate Huston**, Engineering Director of Mobile at DuckDuckGo  
(Supermanagers, [episode #30](#))

### 3. Help you discover and address issues proactively

Do you ever feel like you spend more time answering your teammates' questions than getting deep work done? One-on-ones give you undivided time to address your direct reports' questions, without cutting into the rest of your work day.

“

One of the biggest values of one-on-ones is discovering where employees are struggling or stuck, and helping them find a path forward. Not by telling them how you'd do it, but by guiding them to come up with their own solution.

[Jon Plax](#), Senior Director of Customer Centric Engineering at Salesforce

One-on-ones give your engineers the chance to articulate their concerns in a judgment-free environment where they can be a part of solutions. You can use this time to work closely with your direct report to move past roadblocks.

#### **4. Provide an ideal environment to exchange feedback**

Managers often have a harder time giving feedback during one-on-ones than they do working through challenges and celebrating small wins. This is because feedback can feel awkward when you're not used to giving and receiving it.

“ Try to find a balance in your constructive and positive feedback that works for every individual in your team. Sharing feedback and motivation must be done promptly.

[Hazim Macky](#), Vice President of Engineering at Coinme

The hard truth is that if you want to develop a long-lasting healthy relationship with your engineers, you'll have to bring positive and negative feedback to these meetings. We'll explore how to deliver both types of feedback kindly and effectively in [chapter 5](#).

### **1.3 – Why one-on-ones are a great management tool**

Now that you know how one-on-ones can help your engineers thrive, let's take a look at how they can help you thrive as a manager.



## 1. You build trust with your engineers

A team isn't just a group of people who work together; it's a group of people who trust each other. Without trust, your team may feel stressed or like they can't show up as themselves. Trust builds psychological safety in the workplace.

When you schedule regular one-on-ones, you address important matters as they arise. You will gain the respect of your team by making it clear that you want to help each subordinate succeed in their role. The more transparent you are, the more you will move your people forward and upward!



**Danielle Leong,**  
VP of Engineering  
(Supermanagers,  
[episode #55](#))

“

To me, [psychological safety] means that people have the ability to speak up about their needs. And they feel safe being able to do so.

They feel like their boundaries are being respected. To me, consent and safety are incredibly important because that means that people are able to contribute fully to all of the ideas that are on the team, that means that somebody is able to say, 'Hey, I have an idea', and somebody else could have an opposing idea. But both ideas are heard, they're respected. We may not go with both of them, we may go with a different one. But everybody feels like they're able to contribute fully.

## 2. You retain top talent

One day you're bragging about the talented new developer you're supervising to the senior leadership team. The next, your jaw is on the floor as that same developer tells you they're leaving to go work for a new company.

The truth is that you'll never know when an employee is unhappy if you never ask. During one-on-one meetings, you can ask questions like: "Are you happy working here?" or "Are there any aspects of our company's culture that you wish you could change?"

High performers are like every other employee: They require encouragement and support to perform at their best. When you give your engineers time to communicate their needs, they will repay you with their loyalty.

### 3. You encourage a productive team

We've already touched on how one-on-ones can make your engineers more productive. Now think about how your engineers' productivity can make your life as a manager easier.



“

I give the team opportunities to do well. I feel better, and they [my employees] feel better. And then things just sort of get better.

**Camille Fournier**, Managing Director of Platform Engineering at Two Sigma (Supermanagers, [episode #24](#))

An efficient and motivated team with a growth mindset is every engineering manager's dream. You can promote productivity by using one-on-ones to understand your engineers' ideas, interests, day-to-day challenges, concerns, beliefs, and more. If you understand your team well, you ensure that your engineers can focus on their work first.

## 4. You manage projects more effectively

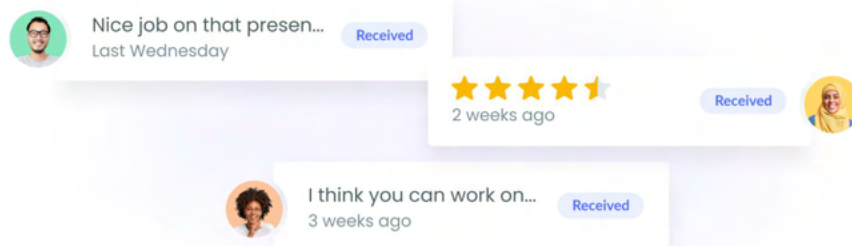
Tasks move forward when everyone is kept in the loop. One-on-ones aren't meant to be status updates, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't ask about the status of important tasks during each meeting. One-on-ones will help you better manage projects because you'll be granted access to all of a task's moving pieces regularly. You will then be able to manage and delegate outstanding tasks.

“ One-on-one meetings have positive outcomes when they have the correct intention, preparation, and execution. When they are conducted with the correct preparation and intention, they become a great forum and enjoyable time for both parties.

[Hazim Macky](#), Vice President of Engineering at Coinme

## 5. You promote a feedback culture

Every good engineering manager wants to build a meaningful relationship with their direct reports. Beyond increasing productivity, sharing feedback during one-on-ones promotes a feedback culture within the entire team.





“

**The feedback environment that you have on a team [is] crucially important.** You need to have people transparently talking about the experiences that they're having, sharing ideas, and telling you whether you're the boss or their peer or their report, how your actions are impacting them and impacting the team and impacting productivity.

**Simon Stanlake**, SVP Engineering at Procurify  
(Supermanagers, [episode #40](#))

Once the nerves subside and your engineers learn that feedback is an important part of a healthy workplace culture, they will also be more comfortable sharing feedback with one another too.

It's a win-win for everyone.

# Setting yourself up for success during one-on-ones

## 2.0 – Engineering best practices for one-on-ones

Now that you know *why* one-on-one meetings are important, let's discuss best practices for having them.

When scheduling one-on-ones with your team, there are steps you can take to maximize meeting efficiency. Here are five ways you can ensure every meeting is productive.

### 1. Schedule one-on-ones on a recurring basis

Did you know that employees who have regular one-on-ones with their managers are more engaged in their work? Recurring meetings are key for continuity! Setting regular one-on-ones will ensure your reports can come to each meeting ready to discuss important matters. One-on-ones are also an opportunity to strengthen individual relationships with your subordinates, give and receive feedback, and check in on goals. We recommend scheduling your meetings weekly or biweekly so you can keep up to date on each major project, milestone, and roadblock.



**You should have one-on-ones frequently**

(for example, once a week) with a subordinate who is inexperienced in a specific situation and less frequently (perhaps once every few weeks) with an experienced veteran.

**Andy Grove**, High Output Management

## 2. Avoid cancelling these meetings

Cancelled meetings occur for two reasons: conflict or commitment. When you cancel meetings, you indicate to your engineers that your other work is more important and that you don't see the value in one-on-ones.

One-on-ones should be a top priority, not an optional meeting that can be postponed when other priorities arise. Establish the importance of one-on-ones with your team of engineers and communicate how meeting regularly will help each member of the team succeed. Avoid scheduling one-on-one meetings on Mondays and Fridays as these are the weekdays that employees are most likely to be away. Remember that it's often more productive to keep a meeting than to reschedule!

**PRO TIP**

Avoid scheduling one-on-one meetings on Mondays and Fridays as these are the weekdays that employees are most likely to be away.



An employee's happiness at their job is in large part dictated by their relationship with their manager. One-on-ones are the best tool at your disposal for building and maintaining that bond and trust with each member on your team.

[Alexandra Sunderland,](#)

Senior Engineering Manager at Fellow

### 3. Set aside at least 30 minutes for each meeting

A one-on-one meeting should give you and your direct reports enough uninterrupted time to discuss projects, review performance, remove blockers, and more. We recommend scheduling each one-on-one for at least 30 minutes so you don't have to rush through each item on your meeting agenda. You should have enough time during each meeting to make it through your agenda items and further discuss any other important topics that come up.

#### **PRO TIP**

We recommend scheduling each one-on-one for at least 30 minutes so you don't have to rush through each item on your meeting agenda



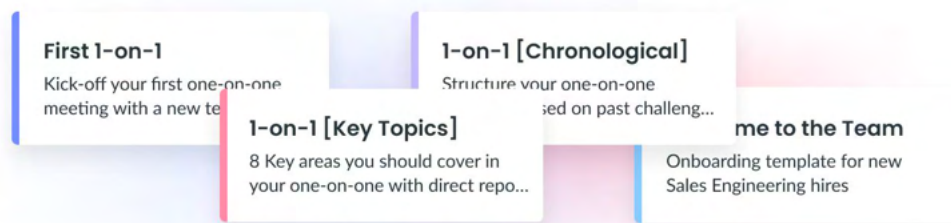
“

My work is to provide [direct reports] with gentle nudges and gentle guidance so that they can perform their best work.

**John Weigelt**, National Technology Officer  
at Microsoft Canada (Supermanagers, [episode #31](#))

## 4. Have a prepared and collaborative agenda

Build great meeting habits through collaborative meeting agendas! Share a meeting agenda with the other party at least 24 hours in advance of each one-on-one meeting so you and your subordinate have enough time to prepare your agenda items. Encourage your engineers to add their own talking points. This way, you will both feel ready to collaborate on notes, record action items and objectives, and send meeting notes via email or Slack after you have the conversation. Try one of Fellow’s ready-to-use one-on-one [meeting agenda templates](#) to guide your one-on-one conversations.





## 5. Ask good questions



“

I usually ask more questions to understand the situation better. And then start asking questions about what the person wants out of the conversation and the situation that you can help figure out. Do they need coaching? Can you coach them through it? Are they looking for more direct intervention?

**Sarah Milsten**, Senior Director of Engineering at Mailchimp  
(Supermanagers, [episode #28](#))

Part of being a successful manager is asking the right questions. You should spend just as much time asking questions as your team does. When you ask great questions, the answers you receive should give insight into each employee’s professional goals and career path, help you sort out issues, and provide you with meaningful feedback.

For example, you can use one-on-one meetings to ask your engineers questions like:

- What professional opportunities are you most excited about pursuing soon? How can I help you make your goals this quarter a reality?
- How can I help you balance quality with speed when delivering this next project?
- I noticed there were errors present in a piece of code from project X. Is there anything I can do to help you improve your coding efficiency moving forward?



“

One [one-on-one question] I regularly get interesting questions or interesting responses to is ‘what are you optimizing for?’ I think this is especially very relevant for the senior engineers, staff engineers, and senior leaders. It becomes important to do that gut check and align, to see the constraints and the trade-offs that each (engineer) is facing.

**Smruti Patel**, Head of Engineering, Leap & Data Platform at Stripe (Supermanagers, [episode #58](#))

At the end of each one-on-one, be sure to ask the employee if they have anything else to add.

You will be surprised by what impromptu questions your engineers ask during this time!

## 2.1 – Why you should consider remote one-on-ones

A high degree of trust is required between a manager and each of their direct reports. If you work on a remote team, you likely don’t have regular face-to-face conversations with each of your engineers. Remote one-on-ones can help you build rapport with each person, at a time and place that is convenient for both parties.

Remote one-on-ones can also be beneficial if you manage hybrid employees or in-person operations. In fact, in the book “Remote Engineering Management”, Alexandra Sunderland argues that a

remote setting may provide optimal conditions to build trusting work relationships.

Let's take a look at why you should consider remote one-on-ones for your engineering team:

## 1. You and your direct reports can be casual

It's okay if your one-on-ones are awkward—that doesn't mean that the setting should be. Having your direct reports sit in an unfamiliar office or boardroom to discuss important matters may feel daunting to some. In-person meetings can also seem overly formal. A remote setting may alleviate the pressure associated with one-on-one meetings for your engineers.

These meetings offer an opportunity to discuss challenges, opportunities, and other difficult topics. The physical and emotional comfort of your own space may allow you to navigate a challenging conversation more casually.



**This is their time and I trust them to use it effectively.**

Some days they want to talk career. Some days they want to talk about current work. Some days they're so busy and engaged in current work tasks that they don't want to spend a lot of time away from that work. Some days, they want to connect on a human level.

**Kara McNair**, Engineering Manager at Buffer

## 2. You have the freedom to choose a location

Modern tools have allowed us the ability to connect from anywhere. When you conduct remote one-on-ones, your engineers are free to choose a location that is comfortable for them to present their best

selves. As a manager, you can do the same. Select a quiet spot that makes you feel best prepared to actively listen and coach.

If your company has flexible work hours, let your employees know that it's okay to schedule meetings around other personal tasks that can't be rescheduled. Aim to prioritize each of your engineers' physical and emotional comfort and a productive meeting will follow.

### **3. It's easy to take meeting notes**

We've all watched during an important meeting as one person took frantic notes to be displayed on a screen that nobody could see. When you conduct remote one-on-ones, everyone can collaborate on notes in real time.

Try [Fellow's browser extension](#) to bring your meeting notes and agendas into your favorite tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet. Focus less on splitting your screen and shuffling tabs and spend more time creating an official record of discussions and action items during meetings.

### **4. You can focus on the conversation first**

We're all familiar with office distractions. While there's nothing wrong with the occasional sound of a coffee maker running or office doors slamming during the workday, these interruptions can take away from in-person conversations. Remote meetings can help you and your direct reports limit distractions and make it easier to have difficult conversations. These meetings also create a relaxed environment to give constructive feedback when necessary.

Now that we've covered our *why* and best practices, we'll explore one-on-one templates and questions you can use during your one-on-ones to boost meeting productivity in the next chapter.

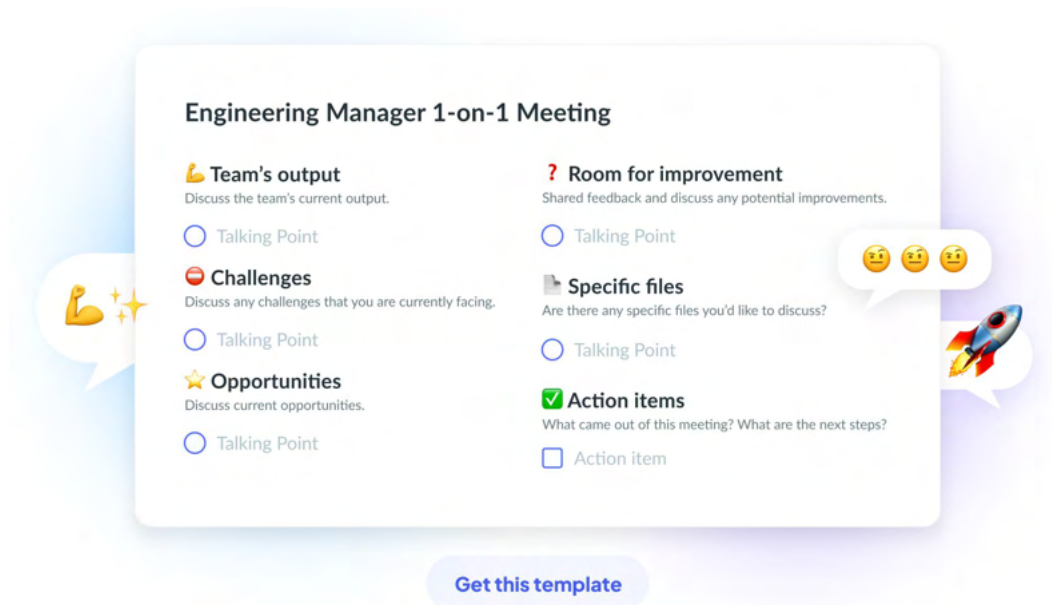
# Specially crafted templates and questions that will boost productivity

## 3.1 – Four powerful templates for effective one-on-one meetings







You may be wondering how to best structure one-on-one meetings with the engineers on your team. Look no further! We've created four [meeting templates](#) that you can use in many situations:

- [Engineering Manager One-on-One Meeting Template](#)
- [First 1-on-1 with Developer Template](#)
- [1-on-1 Engineering Check-in Meeting Template](#)
- [Kim Scott's One-on-One Meeting Template](#)

## Engineering Manager One-On-One Meeting Template

A graphic showing a meeting template card with a light blue and purple gradient background. The card is titled "Engineering Manager 1-on-1 Meeting" and contains two columns of topics. The left column includes "Team's output", "Challenges", and "Opportunities", each with a "Talking Point" option. The right column includes "Room for improvement", "Specific files", and "Action items", each with a "Talking Point" or "Action item" option. Decorative elements include a flexed arm emoji, a rocket emoji, and three sad face emojis in speech bubbles.

**Engineering Manager 1-on-1 Meeting**

 <b>Team's output</b> Discuss the team's current output.	 <b>Room for improvement</b> Shared feedback and discuss any potential improvements.
<input type="radio"/> Talking Point	<input type="radio"/> Talking Point
 <b>Challenges</b> Discuss any challenges that you are currently facing.	 <b>Specific files</b> Are there any specific files you'd like to discuss?
<input type="radio"/> Talking Point	<input type="radio"/> Talking Point
 <b>Opportunities</b> Discuss current opportunities.	 <b>Action items</b> What came out of this meeting? What are the next steps?
<input type="radio"/> Talking Point	<input type="checkbox"/> Action item


[Get this template](#)

If you're an engineering director who frequently has meetings with an engineering manager, this template will be useful for you.

Start your meeting off by discussing the team's current output and by adding relevant talking points. Continue by discussing current challenges in the workplace alongside new opportunities to succeed, reach team goals, and achieve your professional objectives. Share feedback with the manager and ask for some in return so you can go back to your workday motivated to improve. Attach any specific files that you'd like to discuss with the engineering manager during the meeting in the template. Attach any specific files that you'd like to discuss with your engineering manager during the meeting in the template.


## First 1-on-1 with Developer Template

### First 1-on-1 with Developer

**Welcome to the team**


We're excited to have you on the team. Here are some things that stood out to us during your interview process:

☐ Talking Point

**Onboarding feedback**


How is your first week going so far? Do you have any feedback or questions about the Engineering team's onboarding process?

☐ Talking Point

**1-on-1s**

Some expectations for our upcoming 1-on-1s.

☐ Agenda


**About your manager**

Here are some things that might help you get to know me better:

☐ Communication style

☐ Past experience

☐ Hobbies

**About you**


As we start working together, I'd like to learn the same things about you:

☐ Hobbies

☐ Career goals

☐ Communication style

☐ Past experience with Software Development


**Engineering team**

Let's do a deep dive into our team structure and goals.

☐ Engineering team overview

☐ Release cadence

☐ Tools

**Questions**

Any questions about the Engineering team, your role/goals/initiatives, onboarding, or anything else on your mind?



☐ Talking Point

[Get this template](#)


Unsure how to welcome a new software developer to your team? Get to know your new engineering colleague and set clear expectations for their role using this template.

Begin by asking your direct report for some onboarding feedback. It's important to learn about the new employee's first week and ask if they have any outstanding questions about your team's training and onboarding processes. Next, set expectations for future one-on-one meetings. Carefully explain the cadence and purpose of these meetings and don't forget to stress the importance of using a collaborative agenda to build great meeting habits.



## 1-on-1 Engineering Check-in Meeting Template







### 1-on-1 Engineering Check-in Meeting Template

 **Suggested questions**  
Engineering manager asks the Engineer each question.

- ☐ What are your thoughts on [company initiative]?
- ☐ What areas of the business should we be focusing on?
- ☐ What feature should we build?
- ☐ What are we not paying enough attention to?
- ☐ What structures make sense / don't make sense?





 **Action Items**  
What came out of this meeting? What are your next steps?

☐ Action item

Get this template


If you want to use one-on-one meetings with your engineers and developers to collect their opinions on various aspects of the business, check out this template.

The template includes suggested questions engineering managers can ask the engineers on their team to gather insight into team objectives and company-wide goals. For example, if your team is working on a new software upgrade, you can use this template to ask your developers questions like: What are your thoughts on this initiative? What features should we build in addition to what we're already working on? If you're looking for general feedback on your team or business, you can use this template to track answers to questions such as: What areas of the business should we be focusing on? What structures make sense or don't make sense? Once you've collected your employee's feedback, create a list of action items in the template that detail the next steps.




## Kim Scott's One-on-One Meeting Template

### Kim Scott's One-on-One Meeting


 **Progress toward goals**  
How are you progressing towards your goals? What roadblocks have you run into?


☐ Talking Point




☒ **Career Action Plan**  
Talk about and follow up on action items determined in the Career Action Plan.

☐ Action item



 **Manager feedback**  
The employee gives feedback to the manager.

☐ What's on your mind this week?



☐ How happy were you this past week?

☐ How productive were you this past week?

☐ What feedback do you have for me?

[Get this template](#)

This template will help engineers supercharge their 1:1 meetings and kick-start valuable conversations. It was curated by Kim Scott, author of *Just Work* and *Radical Candor*.

Using this template, managers and their reports can discuss progress towards goals and any roadblocks they are facing. For example, you can ask where you can be of help and unblock them.

This template prompts the participants to have an important discussion about their career action plan so both parties can recognize the work that is being done in order to achieve any prior goals that were set for growth.

Lastly, taking the time for your report to give you feedback is crucial for both of you! Creating a space for them to share their thoughts, offer feedback and build trust will do wonders for team morale.

Remember to be open about the feedback you receive and ask questions to fully understand them. This is a great opportunity for you and your report to grow.

## 3.2 – 44 questions great engineering managers ask their employees

Good managers ask good questions. If you find yourself at a loss for words during your one-on-one meetings with your engineering teammates, take a look at our list. Return to these questions any time you need a dose of inspiration!

“ When the supervisor thinks the subordinate has said all he wants to about a subject, **he should ask another question.** He should try to keep the flow of thoughts coming by prompting the subordinate with queries until both feel satisfied that they have gotten to the bottom of a problem.

**Andy Grove**, High Output Management

### 1. Questions to get to know your employees

- What's on your mind today?
- What motivates you to come to work each day?
- What do you enjoy most about engineering? What made you want to go into the profession and pursue it as a career choice?
- Have you developed any new engineering skills recently? What hard and soft skills would you like to develop in the coming months?

- What's your favourite accomplishment from our development team in the last year?
- What would make you excited to stay with our team in the years to come?
- Do you have an engineering mentor or someone in the industry whom you look up to? Is there something you learned from this person that you'll never forget?
- What are your short- and long-term career goals? Where do you see yourself in the next 3 to 5 years?
- What growth areas do you see for yourself in the next year?
- Who are your engineering role models?
- What's one skill that the best engineers have but most don't?
- What are your personal and professional goals this year? How can I, as your manager, help you achieve them?

## **2. Questions to address roadblocks and concerns**

- What, if anything, feels more difficult than it should be in your role?
- What are the biggest challenges you see for our development team in the coming months? How can we be proactive in overcoming these roadblocks? How can I help?
- Can you please explain the challenge to me from your perspective? Why do you think this happened and how can we move past it?
- How can we work together to address future challenges together?
- How did you handle this situation? Knowing what you know now, how could you have handled it differently?

- What can I do to support you in changing this behavior?
- Who would you turn to for help if you were unable to solve a problem while I was away?
- What is your typical problem-solving process?
- What is least clear to you in terms of our team strategies and goals?
- If you were a manager, what role would you hire next for our team?

### **3. Questions to get feedback**

- What would you do differently if I wasn't here and you were in charge?
- What do you like about my management style? What do you dislike?
- Where do you think I should be focusing my attention at the moment?
- How do you prefer to receive feedback?
- Would you like to receive more or less direction from me?
- Am I giving you enough feedback on your work?
- What soft and technical skills do you believe I excel at most? What can I work on?
- How can I improve as your manager?
- How can I better acknowledge the great work you do? How would you like to receive positive feedback in the future?
- Do you feel comfortable giving feedback?
- What do you wish I understood better about your work?

- What are some engineering best practices that our team doesn't currently do but should implement?
- What makes our team good? How can we apply our team's strategies to the rest of the organization?
- Are there resources I can provide that will help you better succeed in your role?
- What does our team not do so well? How can I lead the team to improve in this area?

#### **4. Questions to check in**

- Can you take me through your process of completing this coding project?
- How do you feel about the work you've recently been assigned? Do you currently feel challenged enough or overwhelmed by anything?
- What day-to-day challenges related to systems or processes do you encounter that I could help improve?
- What's one thing we could change about work for you that would improve your personal life?
- What do you do to avoid burnout?
- Have there been times that you've felt overwhelmed this month? What can I do in the future to help you alleviate stress at work?
- Is there any aspect of your role that you don't like? How can we make it more enjoyable?

Now that we've covered templates and questions you can use to have more meaningful conversations, let's explore the secret skills that will make your one-on-ones incredibly effective in chapter 4.

# The secret skills that will make your one-on-one meetings 10x more effective

This chapter will turn you into a [Supermanager](#) and make all your meetings (not just one-on-ones) 10 times more effective! We'll cover two topics:

1. How to master the art of active listening
2. How to write impactful action items and follow up on them

Active listening is one of the most important tools in your communication toolbox. Action items allow you to easily track your team's progress. Together, they form the foundation for successful meetings. Let's explore both topics in-depth.

## 4.1 – The art of active listening

[Active listening](#) is essential for effective communication and when participating in engaging conversations. The skill involves understanding the meaning and intent behind another person's words. The goal of active listening is to acquire information and understand situations to best reply during each conversation. Active listeners can pay attention to the speaker, take time to reflect on what the other participants are saying, and engage without interrupting. At work, active listening can help us strengthen relationships and recognize the perspectives of others.



[One-on-ones] are really to obtain information, to give information, and then also to build connections. You get the opportunity to listen to somebody and understand what the problem might be.

[Johan Van Heerden](#), Vice President of Engineering at Nintex

Active listening is important for engineers because they deal with a lot of information. The profession requires employees to communicate complex ideas to create technical systems that solve real-world problems. As a manager, active listening will save you time, help you reduce workplace errors, and create a healthy environment during one-on-ones and other meetings with engineering teammates.

There are four techniques you and your engineering teammates can use to practice your active listening skills during virtual and in-person meetings.

## 1. Use intentional body language

Show the other meeting participants that you're engaged with non-verbal cues like head nods, appropriate facial expressions, and an open posture. When you're intentional with your body language, you show the other meeting attendees that you're approachable, attentive, and open to new ideas. Avoid closed body language like crossed arms, clasped hands, and a slumped posture.

While it's more challenging to use non-verbal communication in virtual meetings than in person, it can make all the difference. During remote one-on-ones, relax and expand your shoulders to show you're confident and sit closer to the edge of your seat so you look engaged. Avoid touching your face and try your best to maintain a good amount of eye contact as well.

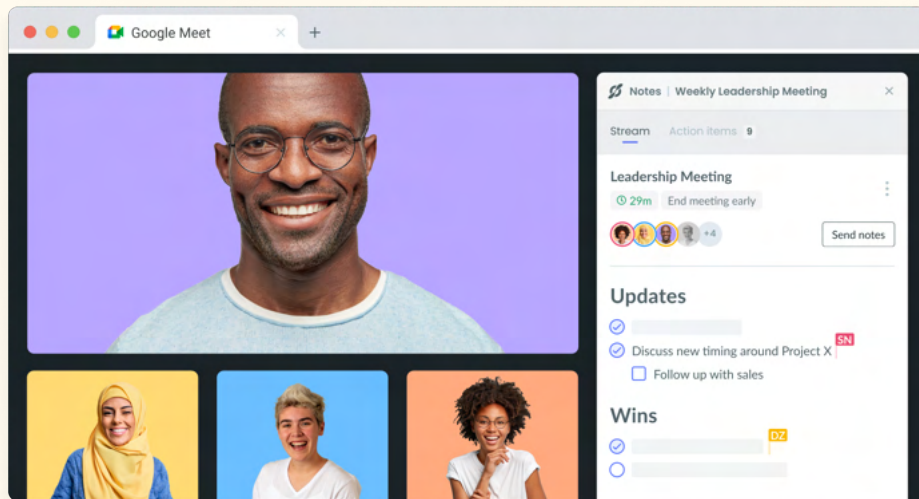
## 2. Avoid distractions

One component of active listening is eliminating everyday distractions from your workspace so you can give your full and undivided attention to each meeting. This may include muting notifications on your devices and leaving your phone behind for in-person meetings. During remote meetings, shut your door; silence texts, phone calls, and emails; block distracting websites, and go full-screen if needed.

Did you know that you can avoid distractions and supercharge your one-on-one meetings without leaving the tools you're already using?

### PRO TIP

With Fellow's [browser extensions](#), your meeting notes can live inside your Google Meet calls and your Google Calendar.



## 3. Leave your ego at the door

The art of active listening requires leaving your ego behind. You can spend your own one-on-one with your manager chatting about your



work and personal life. If you want your team to feel valued, your employees should be in the driver's seat for the entire meeting.

Managers exist to support and mentor employees and guide employee success. Listen with intent, paraphrase often, and clarify uncertain points. The only times you should be chatting about yourself are when you ask for feedback or are getting to know each other.

## **4. Follow up after each conversation**

Show your engineering teammates that you care about what they had to say throughout their one-on-one meetings by following up after each conversation. Between one-on-ones with an employee, send a message on Slack or an email to check in on how they're doing. This is especially important if you've recently given an employee constructive feedback or assigned a project about which they may have questions. Your one-on-ones should be long enough to clarify expectations, but it's always a good idea to see if anything comes up when your employees begin tackling their new to-dos.

## **4.2 – Writing impactful action items and following up**

### **What is a meeting action item?**

An action item is a task or activity to be completed that you document during a meeting. Following every meeting, the assigned person will work through the item and report back to the other involved employees. Action items are an essential management tool you can use to remember important task details, easily track your own and other employees' progress, and hold everyone accountable.

## Why you should write down action items during one-on-ones

- **To recall important task details:** Have you ever felt discouraged when you sat down to complete a task because you didn't remember the details from the initial assignment conversation? Whether you have an excellent memory or not, creating clear action items will prevent confusion during and after each meeting. You can get as granular as you need to. Action items will keep everything organized so you can spend more time managing and less time reexplaining your expectations.
- **To track progress:** Action items help leaders manage a team's workload. When tasks are clearly assigned and written out, you'll be able to see your engineering team's priorities and who has the bandwidth to take on more work. You can also see how long each task takes each employee to complete. For example, if one engineer you work with is particularly fast at fixing bugs in code for other teammates, you can make a note to delegate these tasks to this person to improve team efficiency!
- **To hold everyone accountable:** There are often decisions made in meetings. Action items can help you capture each to-do associated with your meeting decisions as you discuss them. You can also classify tasks based on their progress in the delivery timeline so everyone knows what has been completed. As a manager, you can use action items to hold the engineers on your team to the expectations you've outlined. Encourage your direct reports to use action items set during meetings to ensure you're also taking ownership of your tasks!

## 3 tips to create action items like a pro

- **Use a collaborative meeting agenda:** It's easier to actively listen when you can collaborate on action items in real time. Keep the momentum going after your meeting is over! With Fellow, you can assign, visualize, and prioritize all your meeting to-dos in one place. You can also assign clear [action items](#) and takeaways for every meeting to stay on top of it all.
- **Jot down the details:** Base your note-taking structure on your meeting agenda. Use the agenda as your guide, and assign action items along the way so you don't have to remember what you asked each engineer on your team to do after each meeting has ended. Turn your notes into action items by thinking about the key takeaways with each point you craft.
- **Use the 3 W's:** Each time you delegate an action item, think about *who* should be responsible, *what* exactly needs to be done, and *when* the task must be completed.

The task owner should be clearly outlined in the action item alongside the name of the project owner themselves. The *what* should be a one- or two-line description of the task that begins with a verb. For example, instead of jotting down "application code" on your list, be more specific and write "fix bugs in code for X application" in your meeting notes. The *when* is a set deadline. Consider other project dependencies in each employee's workload when selecting dates for key deliverables.

## What happens after the meeting?

“ There are weeks where there's so much to talk about that we go over the allotted time. I try to not schedule a meeting immediately after a one-on-one in case we need more time or I want to write down extra notes or action items.

[Jiaqi Liu](#), Staff Engineering Manager at GitHub

A team that communicates effectively is a productive one.

After a one-on-one meeting, active listening should continue in other settings such as team meetings and project check-ins. You may be inclined to engage in passive listening most of the time (as most people are). Know that practicing your active listening skills at every opportunity will improve your ability to connect with others and increase your capacity to retain information!

Next, we'll spend chapter 5 exploring how you can have meaningful career conversations and feedback conversations to bring out the best in your team.

# Bringing out the best in your team: Career conversations and feedback

## 5.1 – The career conversation framework

If you want to retain top engineering talent, you'll need to have regular conversations with your direct reports about their career growth. Career conversations will help you learn what is important to each member of your team so you can build a plan of action that benefits everyone.

Russ Laraway, author of *When They Win, You Win: Being a Great Manager Is Simpler Than You Think*, developed a three-step career conversation framework. He implemented his own framework during his time as a Director at Google, which led to a 10-point bump in engagement scores across the organization.

[Listen to our conversation with Russ here.](#)

If you're trying to have meaningful career conversations with your engineering teammates for the first time, following his model is a great way to start. Let's explore Laraway's three-step model.

### Step 1: The life story one-on-one

During the first career conversation with an employee, aim to understand their past and plan for the future. Start any personal development one-on-one with an open-ended conversation starter like: "Starting with kindergarten, tell me about your life." It may seem

strange, but this simple question will help you learn what has shaped each teammate's goals and aspirations.

For example, learning that an engineering teammate has always been a bookworm may tell you that they have a thirst for knowledge and a genuine curiosity about the work. You can keep this in mind when you're assigning future work.

## **Step 2: Dreams and aspirations one-on-one**

The second conversation with a direct report should focus on their dreams. Start this conversation with the question: "What do you want the pinnacle of your career to look like?" This will be a challenging question for anyone to answer, so be sure to give your engineering teammate some time in advance to prepare. You can do so by sharing a [meeting agenda](#) at least 24 hours in advance.

Spend the bulk of the meeting brainstorming ideal career pathways with your direct report. Then, work together to develop a list of skills the individual should develop to reach their objectives. This type of one-on-one will motivate each direct report to work hard each day to achieve great things!

## **Step 3: The 18-month career action plan one-on-one**

The third type of one-on-one you should have with each engineering teammate should expand on their future goals and past. The objective of this meeting is to determine the direct report's short-term goals (within 6 months), medium-term goals (within the next year), and long-term goals (within the next 18 months).

Once you understand each teammate's career goals, you can follow up with regular professional development conversations and normalize them as part of your team's culture.

### Career Development Conversation

#### Life Story

Understand people's motivations and values, the things that drive them.

- Starting with kindergarten, tell me about your life.
- What have been the major pivots and transitions?
- Why did you make them?
- What did those transitions teach you about what you love/hate about work?

#### Dreams

Understand where people want to be at the pinnacle of their careers.

- What do you want the pinnacle of your career to look like?
- List 4-5 different dreams for the future.
- What skills are needed to accomplish those dreams?
- How can I help you acquire those skills? (brainstorm)

#### Career action plan

Create an eighteen-month plan.

- What do you need to learn in order to move in the direction of your dreams?
- How will you prioritize the things you need to learn?
- What opportunities at work would help you develop those skills in the next six to eighteen months? (brainstorm)

#### Action items

What are the next steps?

- ☐ Action item
- ☐ Action item

[Get this template](#)

## 5.2 – How great engineering managers give and get feedback

### 4 tips to receive more feedback from your team

- Acknowledge your weaknesses:** No engineering manager is perfect. Self-aware managers know that they have shortcomings and can hold themselves accountable. During meetings with your direct reports, be vulnerable and chat about your weaknesses and ask for their advice on how you can improve. If an engineer on your team has constructive feedback to give you, ask them what steps they think you can take to improve and how you can evaluate progress. Be open to what they have to say and try not to become defensive.

- **Ask specific questions:** To receive quality feedback, you'll have to ask quality questions. Instead of saying, "Do you have any feedback for me?" ask specific questions about your performance and behavior related to recent work matters. For example, if you recently led your team in completing a major project, ask your team members what they think you did well and how you could've better managed certain situations.

Refer back to [chapter 4](#) for examples of specific questions you can ask to receive meaningful feedback from your engineering colleagues.

- **Restate what you heard:** Whether you're receiving praise or constructive criticism, take some time to restate to the person giving the feedback what you heard them say. This checks on your understanding of the message so you know for sure what lessons you need to take from the conversation.
- **Reward feedback to receive more:** You will only receive as much feedback as you're willing to give. The more intentional feedback conversations you have, the more feedback you'll receive from your team. Aim to give feedback during every one-on-one meeting you have with a direct report.

“ The word feedback itself sometimes has that constructive connotation to it. But it's so important to tell someone they're awesome, how they could be even better, and **help them really grow.** ”

[Alexandra Sunderland](#), Senior Engineering Manager at Fellow



## 7 steps to give feedback effectively

- **Ask for permission:** Whether the feedback you give to a teammate is constructive or positive, it should be on their terms. Before you deliver a piece of feedback, ask the person if it's a good time for them. You and your direct report should both be in a good headspace before having any feedback conversation. Additionally, always default to delivering feedback in person to eliminate misunderstanding.
- **Create psychological safety:** Psychological safety is the belief that one can speak without risk of punishment or harsh repercussions. It's especially important to establish an environment that feels safe during a one-on-one so you and your direct report both feel in control of the conversation. Humans are wired to search for negativity, so it can be daunting to know when it could be coming your way. Encourage your engineering teammates to view failure as an opportunity to grow and move one step closer to their goals.



“

You want to create psychological safety and have a growth mindset to ask if the individuals will grow given your feedback and mentoring.

**Smruti Patel**, Head of Engineering, Leap & Data Platform at Stripe  
(Supermanagers, [episode #58](#))

- **Avoid delaying important feedback:** Delaying important feedback is one of the greatest workplace sins. This is because most feedback becomes stale if it isn't delivered promptly. Get in the habit of jotting down feedback points you'd like to discuss with each direct report during one-on-ones. If the feedback is quick, there's no harm in bringing it up privately in the moment.
- **Use the SBI Framework:** You can use the [Situation-Behavior-Impact \(SBI\) feedback framework](#) to deliver top-notch feedback on the spot. SBI stands for situation, behavior, and impact. The first step in your feedback delivery should be to outline the *situation* you're bringing up and ensure that the context is clear and specific. Next, you should mention the *behavior* that you're addressing. Lastly, you need to highlight the *impact* of the person's behavior on you, the team, and the company.
- **Be curious:** If you want to get inside each direct report's head, engage your curiosity and ask questions during the conversation that will help guide your feedback. As managers, we assume we have something to do with each direct report's behavior. We don't realize that their behavior often has to do with forces outside our control. Start by moving away from firmly held beliefs about your employees and learn about situations from their perspective. This way, you'll be able to deliver feedback based on what you already knew to be true and any new information you've gained from the conversation.
- **Avoid personalizing:** Keep your feedback specific to situations. Avoid using blanket statements or giving feedback on an individual's personality. For example, if you noticed that one of your direct reports hasn't been delivering the results you've hoped to see recently, don't call them lazy. Instead, you can say something like: "I always notice how reliable you are, but I've noticed a change in your performance lately. You've been submitting projects past the set deadlines. I wanted to check in

to discuss any challenges you're facing and understand how I can best support you." Use specific examples when possible and avoid being judgemental.

- **Focus on the future:** Engineering is a forward-thinking field, so don't concern yourself with every tiny mistake your colleagues have made in the past when delivering feedback during one-on-ones. If your direct report missed a recent deadline, ask them how you can help them succeed in the future. During your one-on-ones, never give too much attention to positive or negative things that happened in the past.



“

Being able to build relationships and foster trust, and provide that ongoing feedback to your peers and your leaders with radical candour, and kindness is super crucial.

**Smruti Patel**, Head of Engineering, Leap & Data Platform at Stripe  
(Supermanagers, [episode #58](#))

Approaching feedback conversations can take a bit of practice, but they're worth it. Building a feedback culture within your team will encourage a healthy communication flow and bring you closer to your engineering colleagues.

In chapter 6, we'll dive into everything you should avoid during your one-on-one meetings!

# The 10+ deadly sins to avoid in one-on-one meetings

## 6.1 – It's not working? Troubleshooting: The most common obstacles with one-on-ones and how you can overcome them

We spent the last few chapters learning why one-on-ones are essential for high-performing teams and how you can ensure each meeting with your direct reports is productive.

Here are some common obstacles you may face running one-on-one meetings with your engineering teammates and some tips and tricks you can use to overcome these challenges.

### **1: The meetings feel awkward or forced**

We've all been there. You can tell from the moment you and your direct report sit down to meet that neither of you is excited about the conversation. Maybe you just gave your colleague some constructive feedback that wasn't well received. Or perhaps the employee is new and you haven't established a trusting relationship yet.

The truth is that sometimes, productive conversations can't be forced. If you notice from the beginning that a conversation feels forced or lacks direction, figure out what communication roadblocks are hindering you from connecting. For example, if you're an extroverted manager and your direct report is an introvert, ensure you give them enough time to reflect and reply.



Awkward silence is the best. That's when the real discussions come out. Because it's the pause that's awkward enough that if you don't say anything, they'll come up with something to say, and it will be very deep and generate a lot of conversation.

[Alexandra Sunderland](#), Senior Engineering Manager at Fellow

## **2: The meetings turn into venting or gossip sessions**

Do you have a direct report who likes to use precious time during one-on-ones to vent about personal difficulties or other teammates? While it's fine (and can be healthy) to express frustration occasionally, turning every meeting into a gossip session will do more harm than good. If you notice that a direct report spends more time during one-on-ones focusing on the negative than on their professional growth or progress at work, it's time to put your coaching hat on.

Never fuel the gossip machine. Mentor your engineering teammates on how to address conflict calmly and reasonably. Offer them constructive feedback and suggest feedback they can provide to the other individuals involved. Don't forget to follow up a few days later to see how things are going, too.

## **3: You're overwhelmed and dealing with meeting fatigue**

If you can't give your full attention to an employee because you're overwhelmed, try cutting back on the number of meetings you schedule in a day. Focus on quality over quantity. For example, if you have 10 direct reports and want to meet with each colleague once per week, try scheduling two one-on-ones per day at a time when you know your energy levels will be the highest.

One-on-ones don't have to be overwhelming. Use Fellow to track your action items and talking points and to collaborate in a shared meeting agenda. Spend less time searching for meeting documents and more time running effective one-on-ones!

#### 4: You don't know all the answers

No engineering manager has all the answers. Your team should know that you're human too, so don't try too hard to have the perfect answer to every question. Sometimes the most beneficial thing you can do for a direct report is to point them in the direction of expertise and support them by guiding them toward resources. The next time an employee brings a challenge your way, work with them to find new solutions. If the subject matter is out of your wheelhouse entirely, connect them with someone better suited to help.



“

The next time you mess up and fess up, you will have more trust and credibility with your team. I encourage leaders to start now because for me, once I started acknowledging that I don't need to be the smartest person in the room, I need to be the person that's gonna cultivate a great environment, bring the right people together, and fill the gaps. I don't need to have all the answers.

**Heidi Hauver**, VP People Experience at ShinyDocs,  
(Supermanagers, [episode #95](#))

## **5: You'll have some difficult conversations**

One-on-ones will bring about some of your most rewarding conversations, and occasionally, some of your most difficult ones. Whether you need to deliver some critical feedback or discuss a challenging situation at work, you should try your best to remain calm and manage your emotions throughout the meeting.

Before you have any hard conversation, take some time to think about what you plan to say and practice your words. During the conversations, use “I feel” statements instead of “you are” statements. Remember, most situations in the workplace are not black and white. For this reason, avoid using absolutes like “You NEVER do this...” or “You ALWAYS...”.

## **6.2 – Am I doing it wrong? Top 10 mistakes engineering managers make during their one-on-one meetings**

### **1: Not collaborating on an agenda**

No agenda, no attenda. Before each one-on-one meeting, share a collaborative meeting agenda that outlines a list of talking points, action items, and activities you want to discuss during the meeting. Your direct report should have access so they can view the agenda and include their points. Aim to have the meeting agenda outline completed at least 24 hours before the meeting begins so both parties have enough time to take a look at and reflect on each topic.

### **2: Doing most of the talking**

One-on-ones are a time for each of your engineering teammates to shine. While you're likely the one who will guide the conversation, let your direct report do most of the talking. Aim to do 10% of the talking

and 90% of the listening. Try moving your employee's talking points to the top of the agenda so they can kick-start each conversation.

Remember to also avoid speaking over the other person or moving to a new topic if they get quiet at any point during the conversation.

### 3: Not being clear on the 'why'

Every meeting should serve a clear purpose. One of the biggest mistakes that engineering managers make is scheduling meetings without putting enough thought into what must be discussed.

Without a plan of action, a one-on-one meeting may quickly turn into unproductive social time. If you can't find enough topics to discuss, you're either hosting your one-on-ones too frequently or you aren't spending enough time beforehand collaborating on the meeting agenda.

### 4: Not asking each employee about their well-being

One-on-ones are a time to chat about work matters, but they're also a chance to get to know one another and see how your employees are really doing. While you shouldn't ask anything too personal, you should check in, ask how things are going, and give them a chance to provide personal and professional updates!



“

We chat about you for the first 10 to 15 minutes. We chat about your life, what's been going on, I'll share something that I've been doing, too. It's not just one directional, it's bidirectional, we both chat about our lives. And only then we dive into the agenda, and we talk about the things that have been coming up.

**Marcus Wermuth**, Engineering and Product Manager  
at Buffer (Supermanagers, [episode #27](#))



## 5: Making one-on-ones a status update

We can't stress this enough: One-on-ones are not meant to be status updates. Status updates are better suited for mediums like email, standups, Slack, and project management tools.

If you spend every one-on-one delivering status updates, you'll miss out on all of the incredible things you could be covering. Topics like professional development, career goals, workplace and team challenges, helpful feedback, suggestions, and new ideas should be at the forefront of every one-on-one conversation. Encourage your direct reports to send you their status updates the day before a meeting so they don't rob you of valuable time during the one-on-one.

“ These conversations are so critical to someone's career, and they aren't going to happen unless you have a recurring chat set up and specify their dedicated time to go over it.

[Alexandra Sunderland](#), Senior Engineering Manager at Fellow

## 6: Allowing distractions during meetings

During one-on-ones, the engineer you're meeting with is the priority. You shouldn't be spending this time replying to other colleagues, tending to the needs of your other direct reports, or thinking about the code review you have to finish later. To avoid getting distracted, try muting your notifications for the duration of the meeting. If you're having your meeting in person, put a "meeting in progress" sign on your office door so others know not to interrupt unless a matter is urgent.

## **7: Not following up after each one-on-one**

What's the point of hosting meetings to discuss career development, goals, and ideas if you never follow up after the fact? In chapter 4, we looked at how meeting action items can be used to track progress and hold everyone accountable.

Show your direct reports that you care by checking in a few days after each one-on-one meeting and asking if they have any follow-up questions for you.

## **8: Rushing or regularly canceling**

Rushing through the talking points outlined in the meeting agenda or canceling the meeting altogether only tells employees that you think your own time is more valuable than theirs. If you need to cancel a one-on-one or have less time than you originally thought, aim to give the direct report advanced notice and let them know that you're looking forward to promptly rescheduling.

Remember that all great employee-manager relationships are formed on a foundation of mutual respect, open communication, and trust! You owe it to your employees (and yourself) to give each direct report enough time to work through important matters with you.

## **9: Not checking time zones**

Remote work has made it possible to hire talent globally borders, but it has also made it tricky to schedule meetings for teams that work in different time zones. If you have engineering teammates in other time zones, ask when it is most convenient for them to meet.

For example, the late morning hours you favor for meetings may not be ideal for your direct report if they are six hours ahead of you and want to be wrapping up their work day.

## 10: Always hosting one-on-ones in-person

In-person meetings can feel formal. If you're used to hosting every meeting in the office, opt for remote meetings when possible. Remote meetings make it easy to share documents and stick to outlined agenda and time limits.

Playing around with the meeting format encourages flexibility and innovation, and may just be what you need to make better decisions. Try using a [meeting agenda template](#) right in Fellow for a seamless conversation!

Keep reading to discover new engineering resources to help complete your manager toolkit in chapter 7.

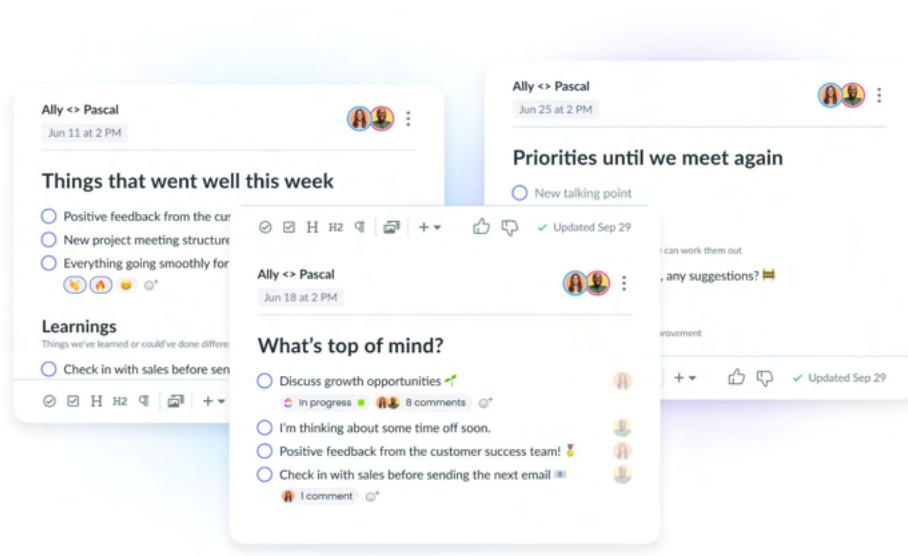
## CHAPTER 7

# Why engineering leaders are more productive with Fellow

Now that you know how to run the best one-on-one meetings with your team, it's time to take it to the next level by leveraging meeting software! It's no surprise that capturing important information is a necessary part of an engineering leader's job. Fellow is not just another tool to add to your toolkit. Here's why engineering leaders have better meeting habits with Fellow than ever before:

- [Never forget what's been discussed](#)
- [Foster a culture accountability](#)
- [Run productive meetings seamlessly](#)
- [Give purpose to every meeting](#)
- [Build a best-in-class engineering team](#)

# Never forget what's been discussed



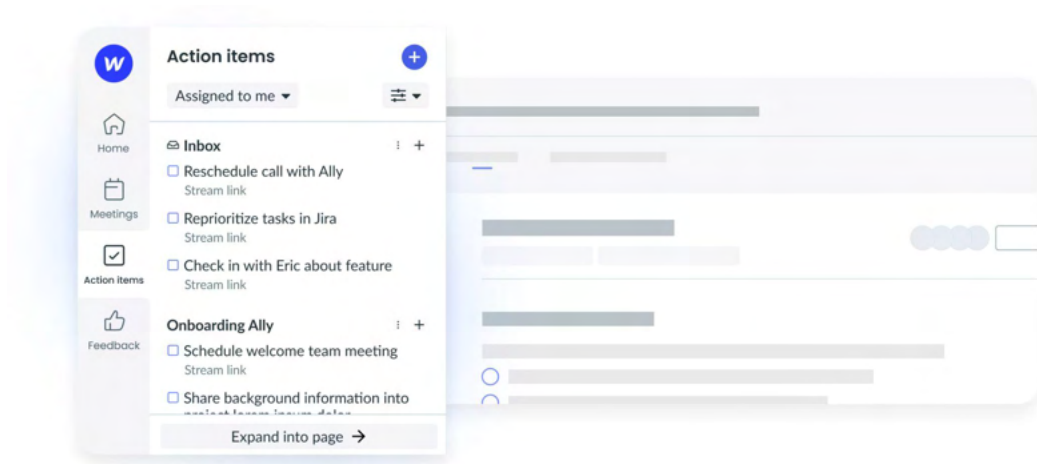
When you have multiple one-on-one's, it can be difficult to remember everything that has been discussed with every individual. In Fellow, recurring meeting notes will be linked in a running stream.

- Easily look back on previous meeting notes
- Search for a specific talking point
- Build trust by remembering the details

“ I have to ask many questions. And in the past, I had little sticky notes and every time I would think of a question to ask someone on my team, I would write it down on a sticky note. And then when I eventually met with them, I had to go and look for the sticky notes, or the colours that I assigned to them.

[Johan Van Heerden](#), VP of Engineering at Nintex

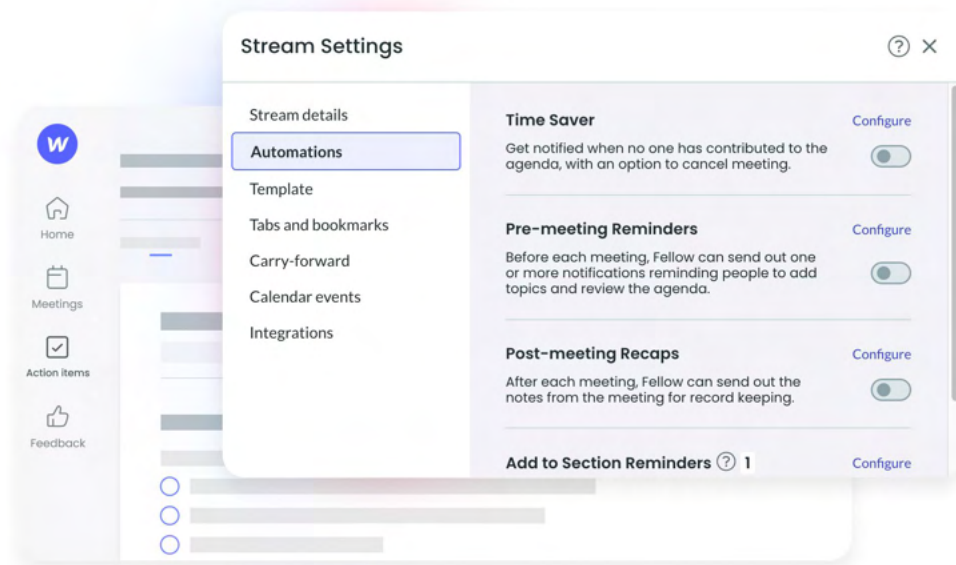
## Foster a culture accountability



Unstructured one-on-ones result in wasted valuable time. Foster accountability at the beginning, middle and end of every meeting with **action items** and **collaborative agendas**.

- Assign, visualize and prioritize action items
- Collaborate simultaneously on the meeting agenda
- Meetings end with a clear idea of what to do next

# Run productive meetings seamlessly



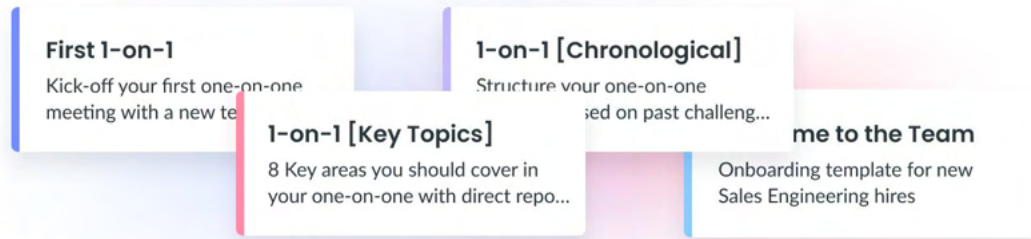
Meeting productivity doesn't have to be a chore. Fellow helps you automate important parts of your meeting workflow so you can have an ease of mind. Not to mention, [Fellow integrates](#) with all the tools like you already love!

- Carry forward incomplete action items
- Send a pre-meeting reminder to contribute to the agenda
- Seamlessly automate with tools like Jira, Github and more!

“ Embedding Vidyard videos in the Fellow note helps us to share updates ahead of time and use meetings to collaborate and discuss. This way, we’re using our time more effectively in meetings.

[Tyler Vincent](#), Director of Engineering at Vidyard

## Give purpose to every meeting



It can be challenging to know what to talk about in your 1-on-1 meetings. Luckily, Fellow has prebuilt 1-on-1 meeting agenda templates for you to choose from to help guide the conversation.







- Fellow has hundreds of ready to use meeting templates
- Create your own meeting templates and automatically apply them to every meeting
- View past meeting notes right in Fellow

“ I set up a template for one-on-ones, and my teammates have to fill in the blanks in the template. And then we get to talk. So it organizes the way we talk by what will be important or not. And it forces everyone, them and me, to take time and think about what we should discuss.

[Etienne Talbot](#), Engineering Manager at Poka



# Build a best-in-class engineering team

Topic	Status	Responses	Last Updated	Author
 Evelyn H 360 Feedback	In Progress	2/8	4m ago	
 Charlie S Awaiting my response	Request	—	1h ago	
 Jennifer L 360 Feedback	All Responded	12/12	2d ago	

Research shows that employees who receive consistent feedback feel more fulfilled in their jobs. Sharing **real-time feedback** on decisions, meetings, projects, and performance will create a healthy and strong engineering team that's empower to ship better and faster. With Fellow, you can give and get feedback as work happens.

- Normalize feedback by adding it to your 1-on-1 meeting agendas
- Easily track your direct report progress overtime
- Stay on top of your teams career goals and aspirations

“ It just takes a leader at the company to say, we’re going to use Fellow, be prepared for meetings by adding to the agenda in Fellow – and magically, things will be more efficient.

[Nicola Paganelli](#), Chief Product Officer at Jimdo

“ Fellow provides helpful meeting insights that decrease the number of touchpoints across many verticals, reducing my overall time spent in meetings by 50%.

[Johan Van Heerden](#), VP of Engineering at Nintex



Run efficient meetings, come to a decision,  
and get back to work.

Try Fellow for Free

# Completing your engineering manager tool kit

## 8.1 – One-on-one resources quoted in this guide

Continuous learning is important for all managers, but especially for engineering managers of fast-paced, high-performing, results-driven teams. Throughout your career, there will always be opportunities to improve your leadership skills and help your engineering colleagues grow.

If you're looking for any of the management resources we quoted in this guide or other inspiration to help make the most of your one-on-ones, we recommend checking out the following books, podcast episodes, and articles.

- [Books](#)
- [Podcast episodes](#)
- [Articles](#)

# Books



## [Remote Engineering Management](#)

by Alexandra Sunderland

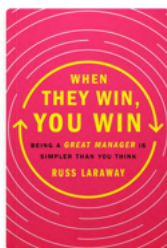
This guide explores what makes for great remote leadership. It also provides practical and insightful advice about how to approach engineering management from an empathetic and people-first perspective. Whether you're interested in how to be a great engineering manager, team lead, or director, or are simply an aspiring leader, Fellow's Senior Engineering Manager has you covered in her debut book!



## [High Output Management](#)

by Andrew Grove

In this book, the late businessman, former chairman, and CEO of Intel Corporation shares his perspective on how to build and run a company. Packed with tips and techniques for creating highly productive teams, this bestseller will help you motivate your engineering teammates (and non-engineering colleagues) to reach new heights.



## [When They Win, You Win: Being a Great Manager Is Simpler Than You Think](#)

by Russ Laraway

Laraway's book offers a simple and complete leadership standard that all managers can use to develop incredible levels of employee engagement. As the Chief People Officer of Goodwater Capital, Laraway and his approach to management can help you cultivate a happy, productive, and motivated team!

## Podcasts



### [TECC 259: The Lost Art of Effective One-on-One Meetings](#)

by *The Engineering Career Coach Podcast*

In this episode, Hazim Macky, VP of engineering at Coinme, explains how one-on-one meetings can help engineering leaders build great relationships with the engineers on their team.



### [Check Your Blindspots: Why Leadership Requires Self-Awareness and Maturity](#)

(*Supermanagers*)

In episode 24 of our Supermanagers podcast, Camille Fournier, Managing Director of Platform Engineering at Two Sigma, discusses the art of managing technical teams and why leaders should continuously strive to improve their skill sets. This episode is ideal for any engineering leader looking to improve self-awareness or learn about how structure and repetition can benefit a team.



### [Introspection and Adjustments: Achieving the Impossible by Maximizing Learning](#)

(*Supermanagers*)

In this Supermanagers episode, Simon Stanlake, SVP of Engineering at Procurify, explores the importance of fulfillment and trust within a team. He also takes listeners through his own engineering leadership journey and the lessons he's learned throughout his career.



### [Diagnose the Question: Why Listening Is More Important Than Giving Advice](#)

(Supermanagers)

You know by now that active listening is one of the most crucial skills an engineering leader must have. In this episode of our Supermanagers podcast, Sarah Milstein, Senior Director of Engineering at Mailchimp reflects on the “bad boss behaviour” she has witnessed throughout her career and shares how behaviour affects output. Listen on if you want to learn more about the act of listening in leadership.



### [Applying a Systems Thinking Lens to Management](#)

(Supermanagers)

Smruti Patel is the Head of Engineering of Leap and Data Platform at Stripe. In this Supermanagers episode, Patel discusses how engineering managers can build trust through clarity and vulnerability. She also shares three key factors that influence productivity and can improve your team’s overall performance.



### [The Art of Leadership: 1-on-1s, Staff Meetings, and Manager READMEs](#)

(Supermanagers)

Michael Lopp (Rands) is the author of *Managing Humans*, *Being Geek*, and *The Art of Leadership* and his blog, Rands in Response. In this episode, Rands talks about the power of scheduling regular one-on-one meetings and asking clarifying questions to identify unengaged employees.



### [The Asynchronous Approach: Remote Management Tips from a Digital Nomad](#)

(Supermanagers)

Cate Hudson is the Engineering Director of Mobile at DuckDuckGo. During this episode of Supermanagers, Cate shares the lessons and best practices she has learned as a remote manager at companies like DuckDuckGo, Automattic, and Google.



### [Ask vs. Guess Culture: Encouraging Disagreement and Praising Courage](#)

(Supermanagers)

With her impressive leadership career, Danielle Leong shares how we can improve our emotional intelligence through cross-pollinating our teams on the Supermanagers podcast. Danielle was the former Director of Engineering at Github and is now a VP of Engineering at a startup.



### [Saying Yes to Innovation: Lessons on Storytelling, Optimism, and Change](#)

(Supermanagers)

John Weigelt explains why the largest goal of management should be to get the best out of people, and reminds us that gentle nudges and words of feedback have a lot of power in helping our teammates do their best work. Tune in to this episode to learn from John, the National Technology Officer at Microsoft Canada.



### [The Big 3 of Leadership: How to Develop Engaged Employees and Better Business Results](#)

(Supermanagers)

If you want to retain top engineering talent, you'll need to have regular conversations with your direct reports about their career growth. Russ Laraway developed a three-step career conversation framework. He implemented his own framework during his time as a Director at Google, which led to a 10-point bump in engagement scores across the organization.



### [When You Mess Up, Fess Up: Why Self-Awareness Is a Leadership Superpower](#)

(Supermanagers)

Heidi Hauver, Vice President, People Experience at ShinyDocs, reminds us that you don't need to be the smartest person in the room. In this episode of Supermanagers, Heidi shares why self-awareness is a leadership superpower and the best ways leaders should be giving and getting feedback.



### [Teams Across Timezones: How to Be an Effective Remote Manager](#)

(Supermanagers)

In this interview, Marcus Wermuth talks about hiring a team that is distributed around the world and how he makes it work. Marcus is an Engineering and Product Manager at Buffer.



# Articles

## [Learn the Value of One-on-One Meetings](#)

by Trailhead

In this short educational unit, you'll learn how to explain the business value of one-on-one meetings to colleagues and understand the benefits of running effective meetings.

---

## [How to Practice Active Listening at Work: 8 Key Techniques to Become a Better Leader](#)

by Fellow

Check out our blog post on active listening techniques if you want to build trust, stronger relationships, and effective communication practices that will help you drive your team and career forward.

---

## [Hosting Effective Engineering One-On-Ones \[+ Free Template\]](#)

by Fellow

If you're looking for further information on how to have effective feedback conversations, help your teammates overcome blockers, and build rapport with your engineering teammates, this blog post may be for you.

---

## [12 Principles of Engineering Management](#)

by Fellow

New engineering managers will benefit from taking a read through this blog post that outlines how to do everything from creating a psychologically safe environment to helping your team solve problems without giving them the answers.

---

## [1-on-1 Engineering Meeting Tools & Best Practices](#)

by *Fellow*

Engineering leaders know how different operations, processes, and meeting types are for engineers versus employees in other departments. Check out this blog post if you're aiming to establish a great routine for your engineering or are looking for tools to support your meeting processes.

---

## [How to Build a Strong Engineering Culture](#)

by *Fellow*

If you can establish a strong culture among your engineering team, your direct reports will feel more motivated to learn, develop new skills, and take on new challenges. Read this blog post if you're looking to align team and company goals with your engineering team's goals!

---

## [The Situation-Behavior-Impact™ Feedback Tool](#)

by *MindTools*

Learn how to structure your feedback so that is specific and effective moving forward.

## 8.2 The ultimate one-on-one action item list

Here is a step-by-step list of action items you can use to start implementing one-on-ones into your engineering team's workflow:

- ☐ Open your calendar and schedule recurring one-on-one meetings with each of your engineering direct reports.
- ☐ Send an email or message to your team letting them know that you will be hosting regular one-on-ones. Explain the specific benefits that the team will get out of these meetings.
- ☐ Ask each engineering teammate what time and place works best for their first one-on-one so they feel involved from the beginning. Remember, one-on-ones can take place in person, remotely, over coffee or a meal, or even during a nice walk near the office.
- ☐ Create a collaborative agenda with talking points for each one-on-one meeting and share it with each direct report at least 24 hours in advance. Use one of Fellow's [meeting agenda templates](#) to get started!
- ☐ Determine at least three open-ended questions you want to ask each direct report during your first one-on-one meetings. Refer to our list of questions from chapter 3 for inspiration.
- ☐ Maintain a shared document that includes notes, key takeaways, and action items with each of your engineering teammates for one-on-one meetings.
- ☐ Assign clear action items during each one-on-one. Each action item should start with a verb, be specific, and have a clear deadline attached to it

- ☐ During the first one-on-ones you have with your engineering colleagues, practice our four active listening techniques from chapter 4: using intentional body language, avoiding distractions, and leaving your ego at the door.
- ☐ After your first one-on-ones, follow up with each direct report to see how they're doing as they begin implementing feedback or tackling new to dos.
- ☐ Practice delivering both constructive and positive feedback before and during each one-on-one meeting.
- ☐ Use our seven steps to give feedback effectively from chapter 5. These include asking for permission, creating psychological safety, avoiding delaying important feedback, using the SBI framework, being curious, avoiding personalizing, and focusing on the future.
- ☐ Ask each engineering direct report for feedback about yourself and your leadership. You may be surprised by what you learn!
- ☐ Use our four tips in chapter 5 to receive better feedback from your team. This includes acknowledging your weaknesses, asking specific questions, restating what you hear throughout each conversation, and rewarding feedback to receive more.
- ☐ Use Laraway's career conversation framework to conduct the life story one-on-one, the dreams and aspirations one-on-one, and the 18-month career action plan one-on-one to discuss short- and long-term goals and career growth with each engineering colleague on your team.
- ☐ Refer back to chapter 6 whenever you feel like one-on-ones aren't going well to help you realize what needs to change.
- ☐ Watch Fellow's panel on [How to Run Great Engineering 1:1's](#) featuring technical leaders from all levels.

## Parting advice

Your engineering manager toolkit should grow with you. Each time you up a new technique that helps you better run your one-on-one meetings, take a mental (or physical) note.

Before you know it, your toolbox will be overflowing with skills that you can use to yourself and your engineering team!