

The Ultimate 1:1s Best Practices Guide for Engineering Managers

The single most impactful thing you can do to improve performance and retention across your development team is to hold routine 1:1 meetings. These sessions are where true management happens—where you connect with your team, understand their needs, and guide them to success.

This brief guide outlines the essential best practices for effective 1:1 meetings that drive higher performance and satisfaction from your developers. For detailed explanations, check out our full post on [Why 1:1s Matter \(And How to Do Them!\)](#)

Why 1:1s Matter

Routine 1:1s are the backbone of effective management. They give your team members a dedicated space to discuss what's on their minds, beyond daily tasks. These meetings build relationships, reveal individual strengths and weaknesses, and foster trust. Stronger relationships lead to more effective leadership and better team success.

For software developers, routine 1:1s are even more critical. Navigating a technical career is challenging—whether your direct report wants to grow as an individual contributor or transition into people management. These meetings are essential for uncovering issues that might be masked by technical nuance. Think of it as pulling your developers out of the fog of day-to-day work, providing clarity and alignment.

Best Practices for Effective 1:1 Meetings

To unlock the full potential of your 1:1s, follow these best practices:

1. Schedule Them Regularly – Weekly or Bi-weekly

- **Why It Matters:** Unscheduled 1:1s often fall by the wayside due to busy schedules. By setting a regular time, you ensure these crucial meetings happen consistently.
- **How to Implement:** Aim for weekly 1:1s. If you have more than 10 direct reports, bi-weekly is acceptable, but make weekly meetings your goal as soon as possible. The time saved from preventing avoidable issues will be much more than the time invested.

2. Keep Them Short and Focused

- **Why It Matters:** A 30-minute meeting strikes the right balance between being impactful and manageable. Longer meetings can become a burden and increase the risk of rescheduling.
- **How to Implement:** Stick to a 30-minute time frame. As a general framework, start with 10 minutes for your team member to bring up their topics, 10 minutes for your agenda, and 10 minutes for future planning.

3. Focus on the Direct's Issues

- **Why It Matters:** The primary purpose of a 1:1 is to address your team member's concerns, not yours. This approach builds trust and opens the door for meaningful conversations.
- **How to Implement:** Let your direct reports lead the conversation. If they need more time, allow it. Over time, you can guide the conversation to ensure all important topics are covered. You should be prepared for likely topics such as technical skills development and career path choices.

4. Take Notes

- **Why It Matters:** Taking notes shows that you care and are committed to following up. It also helps you remember important details and action items, so your time committed on 1:1s is not wasted.
- **How to Implement:** During virtual meetings, take notes directly on your computer. For in-person meetings, find a balance between notetaking and maintaining eye contact.

5. Follow Up

- **Why It Matters:** Follow-up is critical to demonstrating that you value your team member's input. It ensures that both you and your direct reports are accountable for any action items and enables continual progress.
- **How to Implement:** Review your notes after each meeting, identify action items, and follow up in the next 1:1. Consistent follow-up builds trust and drives performance.

For more insights on effective engineering management, check out blog.devclarity.ai