



The Handbook for 1-on-1 Meetings

How to run inspiring and productive weekly
conversations with your reports



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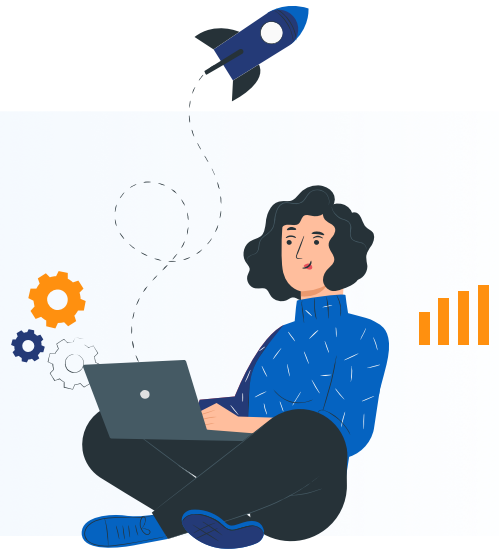
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Let's Start With The Facts



Why It Pays to Become a Top Manager

Want to be known as an exceptional manager in your organization? Only a handful of managers would say yes and you're one of them.

The enemy of great is good. That's because being a "good manager" doesn't get very far. And you don't want to be just a good manager—you want to be a great one.

So what's the secret formula for being an exceptional manager? It's having a great team.

But how do you build one?

Google actually asked this question.



The Key to a Successful Team Isn't What You Think

Since they are Google, they conducted a lengthy study on their best and most successful teams to figure out what makes them great. And the results of their study called [Project Aristotle](#) are the following:

Success isn't about who's on the team, it's about the team worked together. And the following five traits are what mattered the most in the order of most to least:

- Psychological safety
- Dependability
- Structure and Clarity
- Meaning
- Impact

The first thing, psychological safety, is what matters the most and by that, Google means the following:

*Team members feel safe to take risks
and be vulnerable in front of each other.*

It's about being able to make a mistake and not having others on the team or the manager hold it against you. Once you've solved the psychological safety issue, team members can safely:

- Bring up pressing issues and severe problems.
- Take risks.
- Ask other team members for help without looking incompetent.
- Work while being valued and utilizing their skills.

And the reason we bring this up is because one of the best ways to create psychological safety and trust in your team is through a 1-on-1 meeting.



What You Will Learn from This Book

In this ebook, you will:

- Learn the underlying importance of 1-on-1 meetings.
- Figure out how to approach 1-on-1 meetings systematically while treating team members like the individual people they are.
- Avoid pitfalls and common misunderstandings about 1-on-1 meetings.
- Master the art of discussing tough situations, problems, and team difficulties while figuring out solutions and supporting your team members.
- Develop the leadership skills that will help you lead your team through ebbs and flows.
- Form the habits of an exceptional leader and manager.

With that in mind, let's see how 1-on-1 meetings make a difference in employee-manager relationship that supercharges business productivity.

Why A 1-on-1 Meeting Is Crucial For Your Success As A Manager



We discussed the importance of psychological safety in the intro beforehand, but how can you make that happen?

It's easy: You can attain psychological safety by generating trust in the employee-manager relationship. And the way you do that is by conducting 1-on-1 meetings with your employees.



The First Ingredient is Trust

Patrick Lencioni, the author of [Five Dysfunctions of a Team](#), talks about trust as the basis of psychological safety. If not attained, teams will encounter a lot of problems and dysfunctions that they likely won't be able to deal with.

Not only will they not be able to handle it, but they also will not feel safe even discussing these problems. As such, they will become the proverbial elephant in the room—evident to almost everyone in the team except to those people who could solve the problem.

So instead of discussing the problem in an environment of trust and safety, members will be talking about the issue on their own time—behind the backs of their colleagues, gossiping about the problem or making passive-aggressive remarks about it, all the while keeping a masquerade of harmony.

Trust is the basis of any real teamwork.

People who trust each other open up to each other—it's that simple.

Great managers don't allow problems to go unaddressed—they admit their mistakes, their weaknesses, and their concerns without the fear of reprisal.



How to Generate Trust through Recurring 1-on-1 Meetings

If you want to generate trust, you need to be open and vulnerable with your team members. And that means creating an environment where everyone can be transparent and share feedback openly.

This vulnerability, when reciprocated, is what creates trust.

But you, as the manager, will have to be the one that opens up first—the one that is being vulnerable without knowing that the vulnerability will be respected by the member and reciprocated.

In 1-on-1 meetings, you're not opening yourself up to the entire team. Instead, you're slowly generating trust with only one person, which is easier than generating trust with the whole group. You will learn about their personal lives and form connections.

When your team member trusts you and you trust them, the harmony is authentic. You will build an authentic and strong relationship, show that you care, address any issues proactively, and have enough trust to ask the right open-ended questions during a 1-on-1 meeting.

Sometimes, you, as the manager, might not like the questions nor the answers. Other times, it will be the other way around, but rest assured it will be the thing that creates trust and eventually leads to the best possible results.

And nowhere is that more apparent than in today's workplace.



If You Learn Nothing Else from this Book, Learn How to Build Trust

Employee engagement wasn't a hot-button issue 80 years ago. Workers simply had to be obedient. If you were working on a factory line back then, you had a simple job that required no creativity or innovation. There was a quota you needed to fill, and you did.

The workplace today is vastly different.

As such, the employees today need to be engaged with their work and come up with creative solutions to propel their companies forward.

So the one thing that companies want from their employees is no longer blind obedience, but engagement with work. Today, it's about creativity, disruption, and innovation.

And the only way you can create a foundation for engagement to emerge is by building trust in the workplace—trust that goes both ways.

Managers need to be able to rely on and trust their employees, and employees need to be able to do the same.

Trust in the workplace generates a massive return on investment.

We can see what happens where there is no trust; employees are disengaged, which leads to data like this:

[According to Gallup](#), disengaged employees cost the U.S. economy around \$500 billion a year in productivity.

Not only does the company lose on productivity, nearly half of disengaged employees are actively searching for another job. Add up the cost associated with hiring new people, onboarding them, and training them so that they can do the job successfully, and the situation gets bleaker.

The difference in engagement happens when employees have a great manager— More than half of employees who “strongly agree” (5-out-of-5 points on a scale) that their manager is open and approachable are engaged.

Some companies have 1-on-1 meetings, but they are entirely ineffective and are not helping with the numbers above. That happens primarily because the common misunderstanding about 1-on-1 meetings, which we’ll explore next.



The Biggest Pitfalls To Avoid When Running 1-on-1 Meetings



There are quite a few common misunderstandings when it comes to 1-on-1 meetings. But the ones outlined below keep turning up the most.

The first one is thinking about the 1-on-1 meeting as a solely one-way feedback meeting.

It's Not a One-Way Feedback Meeting

By a feedback meeting, we mean that it isn't a place where you sit your employees down and tell them everything they are doing wrong in their job. Most employees hate feedback because it tends to mean *here's what you're doing wrong*. We want people to like us and appreciate our efforts, so criticism often falls flat.

Here's what constructive feedback looks like: having a 1-on-1 meeting on a regular basis, where you discuss both the positives and the negatives of the direct report's work, and they do the same for you. As a manager, this is a great time for coaching. But we'll explore that later when we dive into the three ingredients that help cook up a perfect 1-on-1 meetings.

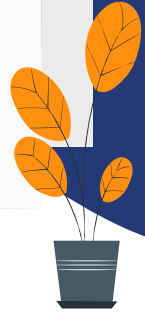
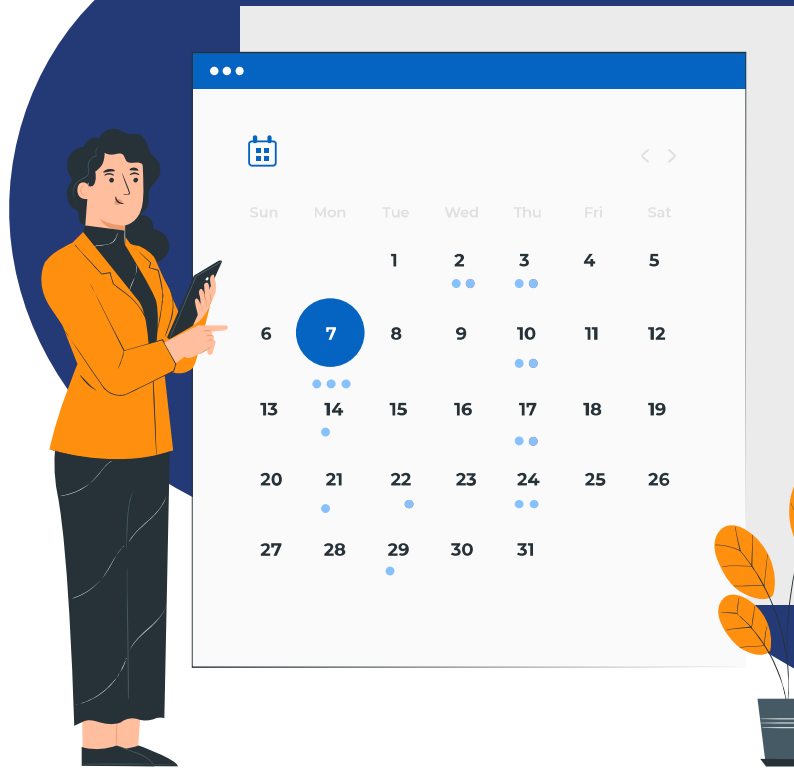
You can schedule an additional 1-on-1 if the employee propose that you need to have one. Don't just schedule a 1-on-1 meeting if you have bad news for your employees as it will mark the session as something purely negative and harmful.

If the First One Doesn't Go Well, None of Them Will

Part of creating trust and a better relationship with your employees is by understanding them, their thoughts, feelings, and actions.

So the first 1-on-1 meeting can be a bit awkward since you are [just getting to know the other person](#) and gaining their trust.

To build trust, it's important to remember that even though the first one might not go well, the next one will get better as you sharpen your skills.



Monthly or Quarterly is Fine, but Weekly/Biweekly is Best — be Consistent and do not Cancel

A 1-on-1 meeting isn't just another meeting that is a "nice-to-have." It's an essential puzzle in creating a functional team. And by having the meetings only once every month or quarter, you are not keeping up with the pulse of employee sentiment.

It's important to acknowledge the team's size and plan accordingly. But the best practices say that 1-on-1's should be on a weekly cadence.

It's about having regular conversations with your employees. That way, you can notice when a problem is about to emerge and can prevent it from disrupting your team's performance.

After all, it's best to kill the monster while it's small.

The common misunderstandings about 1-on-1 meetings will tell us what not to do, but we still need to see what we need to do to have a productive 1-on-1 meeting.

Here's a three- ingredient formula for a perfect 1-on-1 session.

The Three Ingredients for a Perfect 1-on-1 Meeting



A perfect 1-on-1 meeting isn't just about what you do at a meeting. It's about what you do in the preparation stage and the post-meeting stage. With that in mind, here is our three-ingredient formula for a perfect 1-on-1 meeting.

01

STEP ONE — Pre-meeting

There are six points that create a perfect pre-meeting preparation.

Create a Meeting Agenda

When you create agenda items, you already know what you are going to talk about with your team member. Improvisation can be useful, but it needs to have a format, and an agenda for the meeting provides just that.

With an agenda in place, you are directing the talk where you want it to head. That's the ticket for a productive meeting that covers lots of ground.

Send It in Advance

Being a manager isn't about living in a vacuum. It's all about talking openly with your employees and engaging them in the discussions, decision-making, and planning process. That creates a sense of ownership in your employees and boosts buy-in.

And that's why you send the agenda to your employees in advance, so that they can revise it, know what you will talk about, and add their points.

Allow Space for Employee to Provide Status Updates

When you send an agenda, make sure that you emphasize to your employees that you need their input in the form of talking points— i.e., problems, solutions, or comments, the employees want to talk about.

Andy Grove, the former Intel CEO and author of [High Output Management](#), was particularly vocal about this idea. Doing so will create buy-in from both sides—managers and employees—which is the harbinger of a successful team.

Make It a Relevant Check-In

A 1-on-1 meeting isn't something that you just do for the sake of it. Rather, it's something that deepens trust and creates harmony with your team members.

One-on-ones should always be about something relevant to that team member and their current situation.

If you think that there aren't relevant points to talk about every single week, you'll find out soon enough that you're wrong. What's relevant isn't just what's happening now. It's also about reflecting on previous accomplishments (and errors), talking about upcoming projects, and exploring the depth of the manager-employee relationship.

Less Information Is More

The point of a meeting agenda isn't to stifle creativity and make it a chore. It's just to direct the conversation to specific points that need to be covered. With this in mind, less is more. By that, we mean that you should better explore a few topics in-depth instead of talking about 20 different problems without a clear solution.

So, keep the agenda for a 1-on-1 meeting short. But explore the points on the agenda in-depth. By having just a few points on it, you will leave enough space (and time) for the employee to provide their talking points and talk about situations that you, as a manager might not know about

Your Direct Reports Own Their 1-on-1 Meetings — Not You

The last point in preparing a perfect 1-on-1 meeting is making it employee-centric.

You are not doing the meeting on your own behalf—but rather because your employee so the points on the agenda should affect the employee first and you as a manager second.

So, think about the meeting while putting yourself in the shoes of your employees and create an agenda from their point of view.

02

STEP TWO — During the Meeting

There are four points that will help you during the meeting.

Pay Full Attention to Your Direct Reports

When you sit down on a 1-on-1 meeting, assess the current state of your employee. Consider whether they are distressed, focused, nervous, or edgy.

Listen closely not just to the words spoken, but to the way they express them— their tone of voice, gaze, body language, and other similar considerations.

If you're attentive during the meetings, you will notice things you would otherwise miss. Those small things will be big hints about the problems that are happening now or are about to. For the best results, turn off your phone and focus just on the conversation ahead.

Always Make Notes on Action Items

This is, in the end, a meeting. So you will need to follow up and follow through on the things discussed during it.

Get out a notebook and write notes down when you're speaking to your employee. It's better not to write them on your phone because it's so easy to get distracted by any number of things.

Note-taking helps you. But it also helps your employees because they'll see that your 1-on-1 isn't something that's simply a nice to have.

It's an outward sign that you aren't just investing the time to do it, but also the energy to write notes so you can reflect on them later. It creates a feeling of importance. So write notes during the meeting or fall victim to faulty memory.

Open and End On a High Note of Encouragement and Coaching

This is really important when it comes to any meetings. A great public speaker, [Eric Edmeades](#), has a rule called F15 & L15. It means that the first and last 15 minutes of any speech are the most important ones.

Our memory is faulty. When it comes to meetings, speeches, and videos, what we remember the most are the first 15 minutes and the last 15 minutes. Your meeting will be shorter than a 90-minute speech, but you can still use the same principle.

If you open the meeting on a high note and end with a positive remark, the employee will remember both of those moments the most. And the next time they come to a 1-on-1, they will remember those two situations and go in with a positive mind.

So instead of thinking about it as a chore they have to go through, they will think about it as a positive and growth-oriented conversation with a trusted mentor

Coach and Advise Your Team Members — No Whip Cracking

Winston Churchill says that planning is crucial but a plan is useless. The same rule applies when it comes to a 1-on-1 meeting.

You can come prepared for the meeting with your agenda and talking points in place and have it all crumble down by something that happened to the employee in the time between.

Your Job?

Adjust to the situation and deviate from the agenda to meet your employees where they are.

You should stay on the agenda most of the time. But every once in a while, all of your preparation for the meeting will have to be put to the side and you will need to explore a particular topic more than what you planned on doing.

When a situation like this happens (and it will), make sure that you know that this isn't an interview where you ask questions and the employee answers.

It's a time for having conversations about problems, needs, pain points, and accomplishments.

The best thing to do here is to coach your team member. Suspend judgment, ask the right questions, and be supportive. Our program Coach can help you with this.

But if you're attentive (point 1), you won't have any problems having a conversation instead of an interview.

03

STEP THREE — Post 1-on-1 Employee Engagement

There are four things you need to do after the meeting to complete the cycle of a perfect 1-on-1 meeting.

Send Notes from the Meeting — Especially Action Items

Remember how we talked about taking notes during the meeting? Well, now is the time to consolidate the notes and send them to your team members. One of the most effective ways of figuring out what to actually send to your member is the following:

- What we talked about
- What they will follow up
- What you will follow up
- Preparations for the next meeting
- Asking for feedback (explained in detail in a couple of paragraphs)

Follow up on the Notes during the Next Meeting

This is where you make the full circle.

By coming to the next 1-on-1 and following up on the things discussed in the previous meeting, you are showing to your team member that this isn't just something that needs to be done, but it's an actionable conversation that produces specific results.

You need to take accountability toward your responsibilities. But you also need to show your team members that they need to do the same. So once you sit down for the next meeting, follow up on the things discussed and see if both of you did your “homework.”

Ask for Honest Feedback (Start, Stop, Continue)

This is something that you can send with your notes.

Asking for feedback on the meeting and agenda process is something that will help you get better at doing 1-on-1 meetings, It will also help create a sense of ownership in your team members.

They will realize that this isn't a top-down thing ordered by the management team, but a bottom-up process where they need to actively contribute. After all, their contribution will be the thing that either makes or breaks the 1-on-1 meetings.

A great tip here is to use the “start, stop, continue” framework for asking feedback:

- What we need to start doing from the next meeting
- What we need to stop doing from the upcoming meeting
- What was excellent and needed to continue

Build Next Week's Agenda Using this Weeks' Feedback

Last but not least, iterate and change the process if needed.

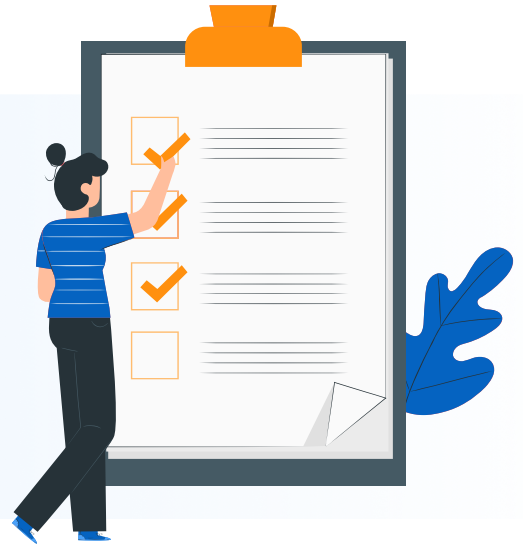
Having perfect 1-on-1 meetings means sensing your environment, industry, cycles, stage of growth, size of the company, team, external influence, and more. Just because something worked last time doesn't mean it will work the next time.

So iterate on the process if you see that something isn't working. For example, if your employee can't get relaxed in a conference room, go for a walking meeting somewhere quiet where you can talk in a more relaxed manner.

So it's not “if” but “when” you face roadblocks during 1-on-1 meetings. When you get there, how will you respond?



We Created An Ultimate Checklist For A Perfect 1-on-1 Meeting And You Can Get It Here...



Properly conducting a 1-on-1 meeting is difficult and the information above will help you gain the knowledge of what needs to be done.

But as we know, knowledge is one thing; implementing that knowledge is quite another.

That's why we create the ultimate checklist for a perfect 1-on-1 meeting.

In it, you will find:

- Template for a standard agenda
- Open-end questions to start a conversation
- Pre Meeting checklist
- Meeting checklist
- Post-meeting checklist

Download the checklist [here](#).

Talking Points Great Managers Pull From Their Sleeves



We have covered the main talking points and situations that will pop up during 1-on-1 meetings. Still, some things will happen every now and again that can have a massive impact on the relationship between you and your team members.

These particular talking points cover three distinct areas: Praise, career development, and tough conversations.



How to Recognize Good Performance

It's crucial to recognize, celebrate, and praise the achievements and accomplishments of your team members and most managers know this. But what separates the merely good ones from the great ones is [the way they give out their praise](#).

A well-timed, honest, and authentic praise is better than a hefty bonus at the end of the year. You just need how to learn how to give that praise effectively. Here are tips on how to do that:

- Praise a specific and concrete action the member did during the project
- Less is more. Save the praises until projects are wrapped up since they will have a more significant impact.
- Be honest and sincere. A team member can “smell” when praise isn't coming from the heart. For praise to be effective, you really need to find a contribution you cherished from a team member regarding their work life, and it doesn't even have to be work-related. For example, if someone is always picking up the mood in your team, that is a praise-worthy activity.



Talk about Your Direct Reports' Career Goals

When it comes to career development, it's essential not just to do a performance review of the team member but also to assess their hunger for knowledge, grit, attitude, and willingness to go the extra mile.

This is something you don't have to discuss often. But talking about this at the first meeting and as soon as a significant project ends is a good idea.

When a project ends and you realize who had the most significant contribution, you can talk with that member about the fast track and leadership programs that will make them grow fast.

Objectives and key results (OKRs) are a great way to entice your team members to connect their personal goals and ambitions to the company goals. That way, they won't just accomplish personal goals but also help the company do better.

This sends a message to you that this employee is someone you need to invest in and they will reciprocate with accomplish long-term goals while staying loyal to the company.

The best question about career development are about ambitions and goals. So it's best to ask questions that would have the team member open up about these topics.



Tough Conversations

This is something no manager ever wants to deal with. Unfortunately, it's something you will eventually have to.

You might want to check out a book by Kim Scott called Radical Candor. It could help you prepare

When it comes to tough conversations, they can be divided into five categories: underperformance, compensation, behavior, team disputes, and disciplinary action.

How to Address Underperformance

There are many ways how you can receive an update about a team member's performance, and a 1-on-1 meeting isn't one of them. You won't go to this meeting to present the KPIs of the team member, but to talk about why the numbers happened.

The numbers show a quantitative picture, but in a 1-on-1 meeting, you need to go deeper and see what the reasons behind the underperformance are.

Lack of training for the job will require a vastly different response than if you hear comments which show you that the employee is cutting corners.

How to Have a Conversation about Compensation

Employees don't want to be treated the same. They want to be treated fairly. And compensation is one of those things that shows the employee that's the case.

Your internal policy of compensating the employee will have a significant impact here. But what you as a manager can do is discuss the potential compensation of the team member and make sure that you come to a win-win solution.

Compensation is always a tricky subject. But luckily for you, if you do 1-on-1 meetings and generate trust, you will be able to openly talk about this topic with your team member.

Even if you can't directly influence your team member's salary, you can give them tips and suggestions on how to communicate their impact to the company's bottom line.

Negotiating a salary is about making sure that you provide a positive impact to the company and that they understand how a different compensation plan would help the company even more.

Here is an example of a [person landing a 40% raise](#) in just seven months on the job.

How to Resolve Behavior and Attitude Problems

When a team member has an attitude problem, you as the manager need to step in on a 1-on-1 meeting and discuss the issues.

The problem can be multifaceted, so it's essential to hear from everyone on the team and have the data ready. Here, a 360% assessment can be particularly helpful.

The first step is to collect data, assume ignorance over malice, and inquire why a problem like this happens with the employee in the first place.

Sometimes, a difficult personal problem is affecting the team member's performance and the relationships inside the team.

When collecting data, it's important to have 1-on-1 meetings to see in person what's happening with the team's dynamic and how is the behavior of one person affecting everyone else.

Empathy plays a crucial role here and you should leave the hearsay aside and sit face-to-face with your employees and hear them out.

As soon as you can get to the root cause of the problem, you can create a solution.

How to Resolve Team Disputes the Right Way

Sometimes, team members won't be able to solve problems between themselves, and you will have to intervene. There are a couple of pitfalls you need to avoid here:

- First, collect the information and then make a judgment
- A compromise most often leaves both sides equally dissatisfied
- You can be neutral and still make a decision that would benefit one team member over the other
- No double-standard—everyone is evaluated by the same criteria

Being a great manager is about knowing how to deal with conflict. Sometimes, that means that there is no middle ground for the solution. But as long as you are fair and unbiased in the conflict, the answer to the problem will be respected by the team members because you're the one who holds the team's wellbeing in the first place.

Again, open communication plays a major role here. You need to make an environment of trust so that every team member can provide constructive feedback.

Team members just want to be heard and their opinion acknowledged and it's your job to create those opportunities. That's how you will not only solve team problems, but make your team anti-fragile (i.e., stronger because of the conflict).

The Right Way to Use Disciplinary Action

Hopefully, it won't come to this. But as the quote goes, "It's better to be a warrior in a garden than a gardener in a war." It's better to prepare for it and not have to use it than for it to happen and you being unprepared.

If it comes to this, just remember the next sentence because it will make your life easier:

Understanding doesn't mean approving.

You need to understand why a situation that requires disciplinary action happened so that you can prevent them from happening in the future. Just because you're understanding doesn't mean you're approving what happened.

This is a place where you need to be empathetic (understand the motives behind the actions) but firm in the decision to take a disciplinary action. Actions still have consequences, after all.

Hopefully, you won't have to deal with this. But if you do, it's better to be prepared for the situation.

See how **TINYpulse** can help you form
exceptional manager habits and run productive,
inspiring 1-on-1 conversations.

Book A Free Demo