How to Hold Effective 1:1s With Your Manager

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How To Navigate This Document:

Over the past 15 years, I've learned that a huge component of success is effective and transparent corporate communication. In this document, I've attached my framework for developing an efficient supervisor correspondence strategy to drive the accountability and support required to reach your benchmarks.

This 10-page guide includes three sections. In **Helpful Tips for Manager 1:1s**, you'll find my top tips for getting these 1:1 meetings in the books. In the next section, **How to Create Your 1:1 Document**, I've included a step-by-step guide for structuring these meetings to maximize time, as well as a **Complete 1:1 Meeting Template** you can copy & paste to build your document. Feel free to send over feedback and success stories to hello@alliekmiller.com. A big thanks to everyone who provided feedback on previous drafts (and ex-supervisors who whipped me into shape).

Helpful Tips for Manager 1:1s

Scheduling
- It's never too late to schedule structured check-ins with your supervisor — regardless if you're new to a team or two years into your role.
- Begin with scheduling these meetings often, and scale back when you're ready (i.e., start weekly and then transition to biweekly).
- Clarify that you still intend to share quick asks over Slack/chat/email and have urgent 1:1s when necessary.
- Ask to schedule these meetings in person, over the phone, or via email. Here's an example:

  Hi <Supervisor>,

  I hope you're doing well. I'd like to make it easier for you and provide transparency regarding my projects, top priorities, blockers, biggest team wins, and open questions. Would you be interested in a weekly 30 minute meeting to share these updates (and then potentially move to biweekly once we hit a groove)?

  Although I'll always reach out with urgent needs, I'd like to set aside time to review larger projects. I believe these meetings will save us time in the long run, reduce back-and-forth and cognitive load, and help my team hit our goals faster.

  If that works for you, I can go ahead and set up the recurring meeting starting Tuesday, Sept 15. I'll plan to come prepared every week with a document to review and will send it over an hour before our meetings if you have time to look it over.

  All the best,
  <Name>

Frequency
- The frequency of these meetings largely depends on your experience, work, and your manager's bandwidth.
    - If you are onboarding to a new team, I suggest meeting several times a week with your supervisor (at least three times for 1+ hour) for the first 1-3 weeks. Transition to weekly 1:1s for 30 minutes and move to biweekly or monthly 45 minute check-ins over time.
- If these meetings are infrequent/monthly, I suggest adding a "TL;DR" section at the top with 3-5 bullets or a quick few lines that capture the top updates, action items, needs, progress reports, etc.
    - Example: Ran 5 technical workshops for 500 customers, led 3 internal natural language PFR meetings, completed 2022 roadmap [link here], need executive approval on overall roadmap and deprioritizing cartoon algorithm, need you to meet with the VP of XYZ in the next two weeks to share the roadmap.

- I suggest scheduling additional bigger-picture career check-ins with your manager 2-4 times a year (see *How to Uplevel Your Career with Annual Manager Check-Ins,* soon to be released*)*

Document
- If you're using a formal document: store in the cloud, make it private, share with your manager, keep the document updated, and always put the most recent entry at the top.
- It does not need to be in doc format. One of my followers suggested creating a high-level board on Jira or Trello. They shared it with their boss, kept it simple, and updated their work logs every day.

Content
- These meetings are intended to move you and the business FORWARD. To the best of your ability, try not to make them a simple run-through of weekly updates, as that isn't actionable.
- Begin each meeting with a few minutes of checking in. *How are things going? I know you were worried about that VC meeting - how did it go? Is that a piano in the background - do you play? Is your ankle feeling better?* Be intentional about getting to know your coworkers. It's not all busy work—bring a human touch!
- You won't be able to get through everything every meeting. That's okay!
    - Think about optimizing time as you structure the meeting. Identify what must be covered, what can be communicated through Slack/chat/email if time runs out, and what can wait.
- This conversation shouldn't be one-sided. Create time for your supervisor to share updates, as well as time to work through problems.
    - Some people time-block these check-ins with a "15-15-15" structure. Person 1 gives an update during the first 15 minutes, and Person 2 does the next. The last 15 minutes are for shared discussion. (I've found this often becomes relatively unstructured with Person 2 playing defense, but I like the intention behind it.)
- Remember to think about your team, especially if you're a people manager. As you structure content for the meeting, think about their needs and prioritize accordingly. *Do you need to ask for extra budget for a teammate? Are you forgetting anyone who has needs you need to champion?*

How to Create Your 1:1 Document

Note all names, financials, and goals are fictional examples. Your goals are likely more detailed than this.

Tip: Some people use tags in their documentation to easily back search their documents. In the following sections, you may choose to tag the stakeholders involved in each action (#engineering #marketing #sales), project name (#ProjectDaisy), or project type (#SDK) or you may leverage a tool that does this automatically.

I. Goals and Values
- This permanent opening section should operate as your anchor. It's where you'll keep track of how your IC work contributes to you, your team, and your organization. Always keep it at the top of your document.
- When your manager pushes back on something/tells you not to pursue a project, you'll want to be able to quickly identify which goal it supports and how. Always having this section accessible makes that much easier.
- If your goals are highly quantitative (ex. $15MM ARR, 15 new customers, 12 new sales, % progress through a dev project, etc.), consider including a visual graph/representation to reflect progress.
- Often I'll include a mission statement or team values, but keep it short. This could also be a "BHAG" (Big Hairy Audacious Goal), something like "become the #1 pretzel distributor in the world."
    - Example:
      <Your Name>, <Work Title>
      Manager: Susie Smith, VPE
    - 2021 Org goals: hit $300MM ARR by EOY, release 4 new products, recruit 17 new hires
        - Year-to-date (YTD) expected: _____
        - YTD actual: _____
        - *Note: if you do not have visibility into these goals, ask your manager. You may decide not to report on YTD progress on your organization's goals if you don't have easy, regular access to a dashboard to grab the data.*
    - 2021 Team goals: hit $50MM ARR by EOY, release 1 new product, gain 450 new customers, recruit 5 new hires
        - YTD expected: _____
        - YTD actual: _____
    - 2021 IC goals: complete monthly analyst reports, develop new operation management platform, improve team QA speed by 25%
        - YTD expected: _____
        - YTD actual: ____
    - Team mission statement: "See the need, meet the challenge."
    - Personal values: curiosity, empowerment, courage

II. TL;DR
- See TL;DR note above. If your update is too long, add this section. If not, skip it.

- Could be helpful to highlight this section in yellow to draw the eye (especially when you have 10+ entries in the document and you want to quickly scroll through).

III. Blockers/Risks/Asks
- This is the most important part of your update. Structure it with top priorities listed first, as you may get cut off if you're short on time.
- Blockers can be related to your team, another team, resources (money, funding, sponsorship), education, travel, headcount, tools, admin, access, etc. You could even flag that you're light on work and need more assignments!
    - This isn't the time to be shy. Be kind but be clear, especially when another individual is causing the blocker. Remind yourself that it's preventing you from doing your job successfully, and being transparent will make things better off in the long run. Keep things factual, not subjective.
    - Have a proposed solution in mind regarding the blocker. You want your manager's help and guidance but you also want to demonstrate that you're taking initiative and actively thinking toward solutions.
- If you have a direct ask for your supervisor, make it easy for them to say yes and help you. Do they need to write an email to a customer? Great, can you draft the email for them? How much money are you asking for? Why?
    - Asking for help or guidance can feel "wrong" or "weak," but it's not. It demonstrates foresight and efficiency when done correctly.
    - When you make an ask, include a gut check with your supervisor if needed. "*Does that seem like the right approach to you? Any additional tips and tricks you can share?*"
- Remember that this isn't a one-sided conversation. Ask your boss for updates you should know about. *"Are there any strategic decisions, shifts, or conversations brewing that I should be aware of? Any word on Project XYZ?"*

IV. Biggest Wins
- Share a few accomplishments with your supervisor (you don't need to run through everything here). Did you commit code on a new project? Launch a new open-source library? Give a talk?
    - Always include hard data (how many users you hit, how much revenue your new feature generated, how much you sped things up by, how many people attended your talk, etc.). Feel free to include a hyperlink to important documents or reference articles.
    - You want your wins and your goals to be connected. Tie these accomplishments to the goals identified in the foremost section, and put the relevant goal in parentheses. If your team goal is growing your customer base and your wins are creating new reports for current customers, there's a gap.
    - Sometimes your manager will think something is a Big Win, and you don't. Trust them, and say "I appreciate you recognizing that! Let me add that in." and add a note in the document during the meeting and fully edit it after the meeting.
- These bullets become a great resource to have as you update your resume.

- Allie bonus tip: I also recommend creating an email folder of your Biggest Wins. Email yourself meaningful team or customer results, save it to your special folder. This is a great folder to come back to when you're feeling imposter syndrome.

V. In Progress
- This is where you keep your manager abreast of your work in progress. Make sure this list is in priority order and include expected end dates ("end of Q2 2021", "by Friday"). Consider including the team members you're collaborating with.
    - If you're in a role that is extremely "time" driven (e.g., consulting), include the number of hours per week dedicated to each project as a count (10 hours) or percentage (20% of time allocated).
- Flag any changes you believe they should know about.
    - Example: Deprioritized #4 because budget talks are delayed 3 weeks.
- This section is highly variable in length, depending on your work type and role.
    - If your list is more than 5 items, bucket or sub-bullet based on the project, product feature, or team. This can also help your manager see the bigger picture.
    - Don't write these updates from scratch every week; they can easily be copied/pasted/updated from week to week.
- During this time, check-in with your supervisor for informal feedback on progress initiatives. *"Do these seem like the right things to be working on right now? Does this priority order make sense to you? What did you think of that last report before I start on this new one?"*

VI. Upcoming/Parking Lot/Future Ask
- Reduce your brain's RAM usage and include tasks that you haven't started working on or don't have bandwidth to take on right now.
- I suggest using this space as a "parking lot" (also known as lobby, waiting room, on deck). When you're busy and don't have the time to take on something new, add it here. This demonstrates to your manager what's on the horizon or "parked." During the check-in, your manager may ask you to swap a progress item above with something in this section.

VII. Quick Fire
- This is an optional section used to aggregate questions for your manager for quick-fire and can be especially helpful when you're first starting a role.
    - You might include questions about company culture, the makeup of adjacent teams, organization structure, acronyms, the best place to find X, etc.
- Be intentional about asking what "cannot be Googled." Your goal is to become more independent and come to your supervisor with increasingly creative, complex questions as the meetings progress.
    - *I interacted with Adam yesterday, who mentioned their work on XYZ. Can you give me more information about how that serves company goal A and who is connected with it?*

- *I heard the term OTF in a call with Julie this morning, and I'm not sure I'm familiar with that. What does OTF mean?*
- *Is there a maximum number of loans I can approve per day?*

VIII. Agreed Action Items
- Fill out this section *while* you're in the meeting. When you agree with your boss on a new action item, add it to this list. This provides clarity and acts as a follow-up for the next meeting.
- A manager wants to know that things are handled, and you're on top of it (and that you will come to them if things are going haywire). Make the manager part of this process.
- Be clear on what you can get done and when. Set clear expectations. Ask your manager to take one full look at the list and get a final "thumbs up". If there are success metrics to set, set them before beginning the project.

Your Complete 1:1 Meeting Template

<Doc Title> (ex: John - Manager 1:1 Reports - Goals, Wins, Blockers, Action)
<Your Name>, <Work Title>
Manager: <Manager Name>

Goals and Values:
Org goals:
        YTD expected:
        YTD actual:
Team goals:
        YTD expected:
        YTD actual:
2021 IC goals:
        YTD expected:
        YTD actual:
Team values:

DATE: 10-19-2021

TL;DR:
- Summary

Blockers/Risks/Asks:
- Blocker/Risk/Obstacle 1

- Blocker/Risk/Obstacle 2
- Blocker/Risk/Obstacle 3
- ...

Biggest Wins:
- Accomplishment 1 and results (identify goal above this win relates to)
- Accomplishment 2 and results (identify goal above this win relates to)

In Progress:
- Project A (__% of time, __% complete, on track)
  - Task 1, will be completed by ____
  - Task 2, will be completed by ____
  - Task 3, will be completed by ____
- Project B (__% of time, __% complete, on track)
  - Task 1, completed by ____
  - Task 2, completed by ____
- ...

Upcoming/Parked/Future Ask:
- Parking lot 1
- Parking lot 2
- Parking lot 3
- Parking lot 4
- ...

Quick Fire:
- Quick question 1
- Quick question 2
- ...

Agreed Action Items:
- [write while in meeting]

DATE: 10-5-2021

[same sections as above]

TL;DR:
- Summary

Blockers/Risks/Asks:
- Blocker/Risk/Obstacle 1
- Blocker/Risk/Obstacle 2
- Blocker/Risk/Obstacle 3
- ...

Biggest Wins:
- Accomplishment 1 and results (identify goal above this relates to)
- Accomplishment 2 and results (identify goal above this relates to)

In Progress:
- Project A (__% of time, __% complete, on track)
  - Task 1, will be completed by _____
  - Task 2, will be completed by _____
  - Task 3, will be completed by _____
- Project B (__% of time, __% complete, on track)
  - Task 1, completed by _____
  - Task 2, completed by _____

Upcoming/Parked/Future Ask:
- Parking lot 1
- Parking lot 2
- Parking lot 3
- Parking lot 4
- ...

Quick Fire:
- Quick question 1
- Quick question 2
- ...

Agreed Action Items:
- [write while in meeting]

DATE: 9-21-2021
[same sections as above]

DATE: 9-7-2021
[same sections as above]

Learn something new? Finally hit your benchmarks? Send feedback and success stories to hello@alliekmiller.com - I'd love to hear from you!

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