

## One-on-Ones That Don't Suck | 033

Welcome to Lean Leadership for Ops Managers, the podcast for leaders in Ops Management who want to spark improvement, foster engagement, and boost problem solving - AND still get their day job done. Here's your host, Leadership Trainer, Lean Enthusiast, and Spy Thriller Junkie, Jamie V. Parker.

Okay, are you ready to groan and roll your eyes? Don't lie. I know some of you are getting ready to do it. Why? Because I'm talking about one on ones, I was so stoked when my conversation with Dorsey turned to one on ones.

Yes, now we're talking, every leader should be doing these, I'm passionate about them. I kind of consider these a non-negotiable, right? Like this is something you've got to do as a leader.

But typically, when I'm talking with operations executives and managers about doing one on ones, I get responses like these, "Oh, you know, I talk to my direct reports all the time. I mean, we talk multiple times a day. So that's like, it's really our one on ones we don't need extra." Or, you know, I do them when I can, we're just so busy, I can't really schedule them. So, you know, just when I have some free time, then I grab one of the managers on my team, and we do that one on one. Or, you know, I used to schedule them, but we just had to cancel them all the time. Like we're just so busy, and they just kind of fell to the wayside or sometimes I even get responses like these, I used to do them, they just didn't seem valuable enough to keep schedules that much time off my calendar, too much time spent not enough value. Or, you know, my boss does them with me, or my last boss did them with me. And I just never really got any value out of them. So I don't want to do that to the people on my team. Or, you know, I do them because I'm supposed to, I just don't know that they really add a lot of value, I think that they could be done better. Does any of this sound familiar?

You know, a while back, I was working with a client organization, a manufacturing company. And I was working with their mid to senior-level operations managers. So the CEO, the VP of manufacturing, and the operations managers who lead the production lines and we were doing skill development on listening. And one of the things we uncovered through this process is that none of them were consistently doing one on ones. Now the CEO was really interesting because he was open to trying them. But he was suspicious. He had been learning for 30 plus years never really had this need or draw to do these. He had good relationships, he gave feedback. This is a leader that I greatly admire. And he just never really saw value in the one-on-one activity that I'm going to talk about today. Now he didn't like push back aggressively in the meeting, of course, he was a leader. So he led by example, he didn't want his team to see that he was definitely suspicious about why do I actually need to do this? This seems like a lot of time I'm about to dedicate what how is this going to help?

Well, fast forward 12 months later, he's been doing monthly. Since then, for 12 months, he's had monthly scheduled one on ones with each of his direct reports. And now he swears by them. The one on ones really enables him to step up his leadership game and develop and challenge and nurture his direct reports in ways that just didn't happen before. So he went from suspicious before, like, I've been doing this 30 plus years, I've never really done that. I'm not sure there's enough value there. Two, I'll never lead a different

### One-on-Ones That Don't Suck | 033

way again, like these will always be part of his leadership from here on out. Remember, business is personal and leadership is a relationship and so with all of this, I'm going to ask you for a favor. Regardless of what your personal experiences have been, regardless of what your beliefs are about one-on-ones, I want you to listen to this episode with an open mind and allow for other possibilities.

>>>>

All right, let's dive into one on ones. And I want to start with, you know, what, our one on ones really? When I'm talking about them the way I'm talking about them? What do I mean? Well, one on ones are private, meaning, you know, they don't have to be in a closed-door office or conference room if you have access to something like that. That's definitely better because we want to create a safe environment for conversations. And so a private space is better. If you don't have an office or a conference room that has a door on it. That's okay. Just find somewhere that's quiet and out of the way, that's not really likely to have people walking back and forth, find a place that you can try and make relatively private.

Now one on ones are also scheduled. So none of this is a drive-by business; they're scheduled. And they're scheduled in an advance notice that the team members know about, right, sometimes I will talk to managers, I'll say, "Hey, when are your one on ones" and you know, kind of go through it, and the manager has it on their schedule but the direct reports don't know when they are. And usually, that's because the manager isn't confident that they're going to keep that schedule. So they put it on their schedule, you know, kind of like, I put waking up at 5 am on my schedule, I'm not really confident that's going to happen. So I'm not actually scheduling anything with any other people at that time. So that's not what we're talking about. Your direct reports should know in advance exactly when those are going to be what day and what time.

And they need to be consistent. So you want to have them on a frequency on a routine.

Now, one on ones are rarely canceled, and only occasionally rescheduled, you have to protect your one-on-one time. Now, of course, people go on vacation, and I encourage you to look first, can you reschedule it, instead of just saying, "Oh, we're going to skip your one-on-one this week." Can you possibly reschedule it? Reschedule first, cancel as a last resort. What you want to also have is kind of a loose agenda. And I do mean loose because remember, leadership is a relationship. So we're not going to go into a very strict, you know, agenda item. But you want to have some expectations built-in.

And your direct reports should understand the basics of what to expect, this shouldn't be a surprise for them. It also needs to be something that you know how you both have a good feel for there's room for improvement. There's room for iteration, there's room for the things that come up. But with a loose agenda with you both having a general idea, you can be more productive, you don't come to this meeting go, "oh, cool, what are we talking about? I don't know. You don't know. I don't know, either. I guess we'll just kind of wing it."

### One-on-Ones That Don't Suck | 033

So we want to have some basic expectations, a general gist, or a loose agenda. In these one-on-ones, you the leader are mostly listening. Yes, you're going to give some feedback. Yes, you're going to ask some questions, most of the time, though, you're listening.

The number one thing I want you to keep in mind is that one-on-ones are primarily to help the direct report, the person on your team. So this isn't a one-on-one for your benefit. This is a one on one for their benefit and we'll come to that and talk about what does that really means? So that's what I mean when I'm talking about one on ones.

Now notice what I'm not talking about. I'm not talking about the drive-by. This is probably the most common feedback I get from managers and executives, about one on ones and why they don't do them. I just talked to them all the time. I call them all the time or I go by their desk all the time or I go by the line all the time. We have conversations we are in meetings. I mean, we're in meetings every day in group meetings, and you know, we talk in the hallways, right. Those are drive-bys. That is very different from a planned scheduled private one on one time where they know what to expect.

The same for the last minutes, "oh, well, when I have on time on my schedule, then I go *[inaudible 00:08:44]*." I've had managers say that and executives say that well, when time frees up, then I go and grab a manager or grab a supervisor on my team and that's when we have it. That's last minute, it's not the same, you're not going to get the same benefits and outcomes from that compared to the scheduled; the in advanced.

We have a general expectation, somebody can prepare for it, they understand what to expect, they're not thrown off guard, they're not questioning the agenda. They're not thinking about all the other stuff that they have going on that they just got pulled away from.

One on ones or not one of the first things canceled. We see this a lot because we think that it's kind of this extra thing. And so when we start needing to find the time, these will be some of the things that we pull off first. Now, when we commit, we commit to one on ones.

They are also not project management or task tracking meetings. So this is not where you're going to kind of come in, sit down and say, okay, where are you on this project? And give me an update here and what's going on here? What's the status here? There's not like a checklist. This is not a status update is not a task tracking meeting, where you're just getting all of the updates from them and they're just feeding all the information so that you're on the same page.

It's also not an info dump, where you're just dumping the information on that you're just dumping up. Here's the HR update and I want you to know about this COVID policy, and I want you to know, here's this oh, and I have a message for you, right? We're not doing the info dump. Either way, I'm not dumping info on them and I'm not just collecting status updates. That's not what we're talking about.

### One-on-Ones That Don't Suck | 033

Now, before I dig into a little bit more about what we really are talking about. How it comes to life? What it sounds like? What is a loose agenda? I do want to answer a couple of the most common logistics, tactical questions I get first. That way you can let that out of your brain, you can let it go, and then focus on what I'm going to talk about next.

The most common tactical question I get is how frequently do I really have to do these? And how long do they have to be? And it depends. If you're not sure, I would say more frequent is better. So weekly, or bi-weekly is typically where you want to be. For Executives, you might find that monthly one on ones works, or maybe bi-weekly. So you might be able to go monthly, it just depends on what's happening with you. How you lead your team and the performance and strategy meetings that are happening outside of the one on ones. So, you know, could be typical, you know, if you're not sure, you can start with bi-weekly, or you could start with weekly, and then you know, go to bi-weekly, if you don't need them quite that frequent. I would say err on the side of too frequent rather than not frequently enough.

But there's a caveat. If doing them weekly, or doing them bi-weekly is a barrier for you to get them done. If that's what's holding you back from following through because you don't have the discipline or the schedule control yet then I would say start monthly, get consistent, get the discipline, build the discipline of doing the monthly, and then add a second one per month. And then if you need to, you can go weekly, don't let the frequency be an excuse for not doing it.

Now, next question, how long should you schedule them for? Well, listen, just in general, I try not to schedule meetings on the 30 minute or 60-minute mark, right, because you always need a minute and use of minutes to transition between meetings to refresh your notes to walk from one side of the building to the next or heaven forbid, take a restroom break. So you're going to hear me use numbers like 25 minutes or 55 minutes or 85. The reason is, because of that, I want you to leave a break in there.

Now for one on ones, you're probably going to be somewhere between 25 and 55 minutes most of the time, possibly an 85 minute in certain situations. So for example, with that executive doing a monthly one-on-one, with their direct report, they might do an 85 minute, once a month. I don't think you can really do it in less than 25 and achieve the relationship building and the leadership development, the people development that I would want you to achieve in less than 25 minutes. So probably somewhere in the minimum 25 minutes, most of the time, 55 minutes is going to be plenty, the more frequently you do them, the shorter they can be. So you might do weekly one on ones that are 25 minutes. Or if you're doing bi-weekly, you might do 45 or 50 or 55 minutes. If you're doing monthly, maybe it's the 55 or 75 or 85 minutes. So the more frequently you do them, and then you probably can reduce the duration a little bit.

If you don't know, start bi-weekly at 45 minutes, every other week for 45 minutes, and then adjust up or down after a few months' worth of learning. And remember, if you finish early, you finish early; you don't have to keep someone there just because the time is scheduled.

### One-on-Ones That Don't Suck | 033

Now with that tactical stuff out of the way, here's what I want you to know. One on ones enable you to do three things.

1. Build relationships
2. Support Performance and Improvement
3. Develop People

So we need to schedule and facilitate one on ones in a way that yields those results, building relationships, supporting performance improvement, and developing people. Now here's the loose agenda that I found works best after more than a decade, 15 years of doing these.

So it's a four-part agenda loose agenda.

1. Their Time – whatever they want to talk about
2. Performance and Improvement
3. Their Development
4. Next Steps (really quick)

Let's go through each of those in a little bit more detail.

So number one their time, whatever they want to talk about. Now, I learned that back in maybe 2006 from Manager Tools, and they have their own whole like one on one suggestions and recommendation for the agenda and how to start and like the note, the forum, you take notes on all that stuff. And I don't subscribe, like, I don't do them the same way that they teach. I have just found my own way that I think works best. This though is something that I learned from them back in about 2006 that I have continued to keep. And I think it's really effective.

Because the first part is their time, whatever they want to talk about and I really mean it. It's whatever they want to talk about if they want to talk about a problem they're having with one of their team members. Cool, that's what we're talking about. If they want to talk about how they're feeling really frustrated and maybe angry and upset about something. Cool, that's what we're talking about. If they want to talk about how their kid, like hit a home run at their little league game over the weekend, then that's what we're talking about. This is their time, and you have to make sure you tell them that in advance.

And so I'll typically say the first X number of minutes is yours. If I'm doing a 25 minute one on one every week, then maybe it's the first 10 minutes. The first 10 minutes is yours, anything you want to bring to the table, anything you want to talk about. If I'm doing a 55 minute bi-weekly, I might say the first 20 minutes. The first 20 minutes is anything you want to talk about. So it's their time.

Now keep in mind, this is their time, and you need to listen, you don't necessarily need to solve. So this kind of goes back to some of the stuff Dorsey brought up about like, "oh my goodness, I'm kind of afraid I'm going to end up being a therapist because they might talk to me about how they're getting a divorce or

### One-on-Ones That Don't Suck | 033

whatever. You can listen and you can have empathy. And you can connect, and you can build a relationship by listening. You don't necessarily have to solve it or take it on. You're not the problem solver here. You're the partner where you're listening, you're building a relationship and you're going to find that some people love to talk about their family and some people are like, man, I just want to talk about business. Let's just keep it in four walls. That's cool, right? That's their ability to choose how much they want to share and how much they don't. Okay, so that's number one.

Number two is performance and improvement. And so this is going to depend on what's the role? So if I'm a CEO, and I've got, you know, maybe a VP of manufacturing, and then I have maybe a VP of procurement, or director of procurement, or whatever I might look like. So if I'm doing that, then I'm probably going to have a little bit of performance, maybe some of the performance metrics that we're looking at, maybe some of the trends that we're looking at. I might want to look at their leader standard work and ask what you learned from that. Or it might be some of the improvement if they're working on improving a performance outcome or improving processes. This is where we're going to talk about that. Now, you got to remember, it's not like too much project manager or task-tracky.

This is a real conversation but you may want to develop some routines and those routines can change over time. Just because you start with a routine does not mean 12 months later, 24 months later, 36 months later, you still have the exact same routine, because your priorities are going to change, and what people are working on are going to change and the work processes and flow are going to change and your true north goals are going to change, right? So this will change over time.

But it's helpful if you have some loose routines, and you figure them out okay, so what are the key performance indicators that we do want to talk about? Keep in mind, it's, you know, again, you want to allow for conversation. So it's not a report out, right? I mean, you can read reports; you don't need someone to come into your office and read reports to you. It's really the dialogue around it. So think through what are those open-ended questions that you could ask are really going to enable that dialogue? You know, the questions like, what did you learn? Walk me through what you learned from this? Is it just one example. Now, whatever that routine is your direct report should have an idea of this, they should know, it shouldn't be a surprise because you're building the routine.

And you might have to PDCA your way through the routine as well. So I'm actually doing this with a client right now, where I'm working with the senior operations manager. And we're working with him and one of his operations managers. I'm going to their weekly one on ones, mostly listening, and then working with them, to help them make their one on ones more effective and develop some routines and move from a kind of one on ones that are really more like updates, like let's go through a checklist to one on ones that really build that relationship, and create an opportunity for the senior operations leader to develop the capabilities of that operations manager

Which takes us to the development section number three development. So this is what skill or competency your behavior, or are they working on improving, that will help them become a better leader. Or if you're managing individual contributors help them become better team members.

### One-on-Ones That Don't Suck | 033

I have another client that I'm working with, they're working on their people leadership, and so we'll work on a skill or competency. And they're going out and doing a purposeful practice of those behaviors. And they'll reflect on it during the week. And then once a week, I'll get with them and kind of go through what did you learn through your practice? What did you learn through reflection? How did you adjust? And you might be in a little bit of a teacher role here, you might be in a little bit of a mentor here where you're not just asking questions, but you might be telling, you might be giving some suggestions, here's my recommendation for how you might handle that next time. In the performance improvement in the development section, this is typically where you may follow up from any next steps from previous like whatever you talked about in the last one-on-one, like, "Hey, tell me how that went."

And then number four, your next steps, which is really where you're saying, hey, based on what we talked about today, what do you think are the best next steps for you to take and just kind of getting some agreement on what happens next.

Now, here's the thing, you are not always going to get through all four of those. And that's okay. You'll make sure there's time for the next steps. But that can honestly a lot of times that can really be done in two, three, maybe five minutes.

But you might get through and say hey, maybe it's a bi-weekly 15 minute one on one, and they get the first 20 minutes of it. And they're talking about something you get into a conversation or having a dialogue. And next thing, you know, 40 minutes have passed, and you barely have time to get through the core basics of performance. And then you do your next steps. And that's the end of the one-on-one, right? That's all your time you have allocated. That is okay.

Now, if you have a week or one on one session after session after session after session, where they spend the whole time talking about their stuff, then you know, there's probably something else going on, you're going to need to readjust, maybe reset some expectations. Or you might need to do some more relationship building. Right? It's, you're just going to have to gauge it. That's going to be a case by case. What's going on?

So this is a gist, but really what one on ones really are, and how they can be so helpful. So here's what we did, we talked about what one on ones are in art, we reframing to understand that one on ones enables you to do three things, to build relationships, to support performance and improvement, and to develop people. And we learned this loose agenda that I've found works best in that is number one, their time. Number two performance or improvement, number three, development, their own development. And number four next steps.

Here are your next steps. And I have two of them for you.

The first next step:

SA you can imagine, there's a lot more nuance to creating valuable one on ones. How do you get started? Especially because at the beginning, they are a little bit different than you know, once you get into a routine,

### One-on-Ones That Don't Suck | 033

you've been doing it for six months. So how do you get started? What happens when this kind of thing happens? What happens when they're quiet? And they don't say anything? What happens when they talk tons and they don't stop talking? You know, all of these different nuances? What are the types of questions that I ask? How do I build relationships and ask questions and get to know them without being prying into their life? And how do I have conversations that help to know them as an individual and also work on the business? Like all of this stuff.

If you are interested in learning more about the specifics, how to get started the nuances of doing them how to improve them after you've been doing them for a while, then I want you to let me know.

You can comment on the episode post, which is that [www.ProcessPlusResults.com/podcast](http://www.ProcessPlusResults.com/podcast) . Or you can comment on any of my social media posts about this episode. Or you can send me a LinkedIn message. Or you can even send me a direct email at [Jamie@ProcessPlusResults.com](mailto:Jamie@ProcessPlusResults.com).

If this is a topic that listeners want more of, and then I will deliver on it, I just need to know. So let me know if you want me to do more if you want me to dig into the details and help you not just learn, right to help you move beyond this overview, and really execute and integrate one on ones into your every day, not in a way that they're just a checklist, right? Or just check boxing it, but in a way that it really adds value. Now, that's your first next step.

Your second next step:

I want you to do a Plus / Delta on your current state of one on ones, whether you're having them or not, even if you're not happy having them even if you are.

Get a sheet of paper or whiteboard, whatever you have, draw a line down the middle and reflect on the pluses what's going well, and on the deltas could be better if. So do a plus delta on your current state of one on ones.

I'd love to hear what you come up with when you do this too. So definitely share that with me.

Alright, that's it for today.

Remember, as I told you I get so pumped up about this. I've barely like scratched the surface. I'm like, "Oh my goodness, I could talk about this for hours." Alright, so anyways, remember to get the show notes at [www.ProcessPlusResults.com/podcast](http://www.ProcessPlusResults.com/podcast) , and then find Episode #33. When you get there, you can also sign up to get access to some on-demand training and learning resources. So that's [www.ProcessPlusResults.com/podcast](http://www.ProcessPlusResults.com/podcast) , episode thirty-three. And that's also where you can scroll down and comment if you want to hear more about this topic. Until next time.