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How to do Team Member Engagement

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Team member engagement is the degree to which a team member feels connected to their job. Engaged team members are far more productive than disengaged team members. (Disengaged team members feel no real connection to their jobs and tend to do the bare minimum.) The objective is to have a team of highly engaged team members, and that is what this step is all about. Team member engagement is accomplished by giving feedback, providing autonomy and empowerment, by doing Weekly Check-Ins and Quarterly Mentoring.

Engaged team members produce superior results, are more productive, loyal and stay at an organisation longer, and team member engagement links to better business outcomes. Based on over 50 years of team member engagement research, Gallup has shown that engaged team members produce better business outcomes than others - across industry, company size and nationality, and in good economic times and bad.

- Engaged team members are highly involved in and enthusiastic about their work and workplace. They are psychological "owners" who drive high performance and innovation and move the organisation forward.
- Non-engaged team members are psychologically unattached to their work and their company because their engagement needs are not being met; they're putting in time but not energy or passion - into their work.
- Actively disengaged team members are unhappy at work; they are resentful that their needs aren't being met and act out their unhappiness accordingly. Every day, these team members potentially undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish.

Gallup research has shown that engagement creates a positive feedback loop. People who are engaged are more successful, and success helps people engage in their work. Strengths-oriented teams improve engagement and team cohesion; thus, they have less turnover -creating conditions that will enhance the likelihood of success. Researchers have developed various definitions of team member engagement; they have also created categories to describe and distinguish its differing levels.

> Although the concepts of team member engagement and job satisfaction are somewhat interrelated, they are not synonymous. Job satisfaction has more to do with whether the team member is personally happy than with whether the team member is actively involved in advancing organizational goals. Team member engagement is the emotional commitment the team member has to the organization and its goals.

Team members' emotional commitment means engaged team members care about their work and their organisation, identify with its vision and purpose, use discretionary effort, and are enthusiastic about it. They are committed to their work and workplace. Their level of psychological investment is a measure of the strength and mental and emotional connection they feel toward their workplace. This means an engaged supervisor works overtime when needed, and an engaged clerk keeps the store clean.

Engaged employees lead to better business outcomes. In fact, according to Towers Perrin research, companies with engaged team members have 6% higher net profit margins, and according to Kenexa research, engaged companies have five times higher shareholder returns over five years.

Engaged and disengaged team members

Gallup distinguishes between employees who are "actively engaged" (loyal and productive), "not engaged" (average performers) and "actively disengaged" (ROAD warriors, or "retired on active duty").

Disengaged team members feel no real connection to their jobs and tend to do the bare minimum. Disengagement can show in several ways, a 9-to-5 clock mentality or a tendency to seal oneself off from other team members. It becomes most noticeable when someone who's ordinarily outgoing and enthusiastic seems to fall by the wayside and has nothing positive to contribute. They may resent their jobs, tend to gripe to co-workers and drag down office morale.

> Researchers at Kenexa High Performance Institute looked at 840,000 responses on team member engagement from companies in the U.S. and Britain and found that after two years in a job, 57 percent of the respondents were disengaged.

Engaged team members are highly focused and intensely involved in their work. They are enthusiastic with a sense of urgency. Engaged behaviour is persistent, proactive, and adaptive in ways that expand the job roles as necessary. Engaged team members go beyond job descriptions in, for example, service delivery or innovation, they feel focused with a sense of urgency and concentrate on how they approach what they do, satisfied team members, in contrast, feel pleasant, content, and gratified.

> Team members who receive daily feedback from their managers are 3 x more likely to be fully engaged.
>
> Higher levels of engagement affect business outcomes such as. 41% lower absenteeism, 24% lower turnover, 17% higher productivity, 21% higher profitability.

Engagement levels are significantly influenced by the team members manager (through job assignments, trust, recognition, day-to-day communications, and so on.)

Effect on productivity

Most managers understand that team member engagement directly affects an organisation's profitability. According to Gallup, just 33 per cent of American workers are engaged by their jobs. Fifty-two per cent say they're "just showing up," and 17 per cent describe themselves as "actively disengaged" therefore, most managers have a lot of work to do to unlock the full potential of their teams.

Engagement can be affected by social cohesion, feeling supported by one's manager, information sharing, a team vision, communication, and trust. Team members want to feel valued and respected; they want to know that their work is meaningful, and their ideas are heard. Highly engaged team members are more productive and committed to the organisations in which they work.

> "Team member engagement has emerged as a critical driver of business success in today's competitive marketplace. High levels of engagement promote retention of talent, foster customer loyalty and improve organizational performance and stakeholder value." Source: SHRM.

The role of managers

"Google manager research revealed that one of the most important behaviours of their best managers was that they were effective coaches. This is seen in other professions, as well. For example, in sports, many former athletes can tell stories about how a coach changed their life by identifying strengths, unlocking their potential, and encouraging them to persevere. Managers can be effective coaches by focussing on the individual needs of each team member. It is also important for managers to be able to flex their coaching styles - for example, the needs of individual team members may require them to be a "teaching" coach where the manager passes along an expertise to achieve something, or a "facilitating coach" where the manager asks questions and listens instead of telling or giving answers." Source: Google Project Oxygen.

- "Have regular 1:1s with your team members and be fully present and focused on the team member.
- Be aware of your mindset and that of the team member.
- Practice active listening and ask open-ended questions to facilitate the team member's insight (questions that start with "what" and "how" encourage expansive thinking).
- Provide specific and timely feedback.

- Balance positive (motivational) and negative (constructive) feedback and understand the unique strengths and development areas of each team member."
  Source: Google Project Oxygen.

Team member engagement increases dramatically when the daily experiences of team members include positive relationships with their manager. Team members want relationships, particularly with a manager who can coach them to the next level. Managers drive team member engagement. Between regular meetings, weekly check-ins and touch bases, managers see the full spectrum of work their team is working on. The manager is the one who sets expectations, highlights opportunities, improves collaboration, and often distributes the workload. This can only happen successfully when the manager is involved in and engaged with their team.

People want purpose and meaning from their jobs. They want to be recognised for what they are good at and what makes them unique. This is what drives employee engagement.

> "One of the critical high-performance leadership functions is team member engagement, this is because your most valuable assets are your team members. Disengaged team members feel miserable while at work, and that misery follows them home, compounding their stress and negatively affecting their overall well-being. Team member engagement should be a manager's primary role responsibility."
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> Source: SHRM

If you have the materials and equipment you need to do your job right; you'll care more about the fate of your organisation. You are naturally inclined toward success at some things, and by adding skills, knowledge, and practice, you'll be much better at them. High-performance managers need to build genuine relationships with their team members. The best managers understand that each team member is different, that each has various successes and challenges. Knowing their team members as people first, these managers accommodate their team members uniqueness while managing them toward high performance.

- High-performance managers try to get to know their team members and help them feel comfortable talking about any subject, work-related or not. They trust trained team members to take authority over decisions in their assigned jobs. High-performance leadership is designed to give team members room to be creative, look to the future, and find new, creative solutions to old problems. Team members on the leadership track will also be prepared to become high-performance managers through mentorship and training.

- How much of your time do you spend working on your team member relationships? Building strong professional relationships and an environment of trust and respect takes time and effort, but it pays huge dividends in performance.
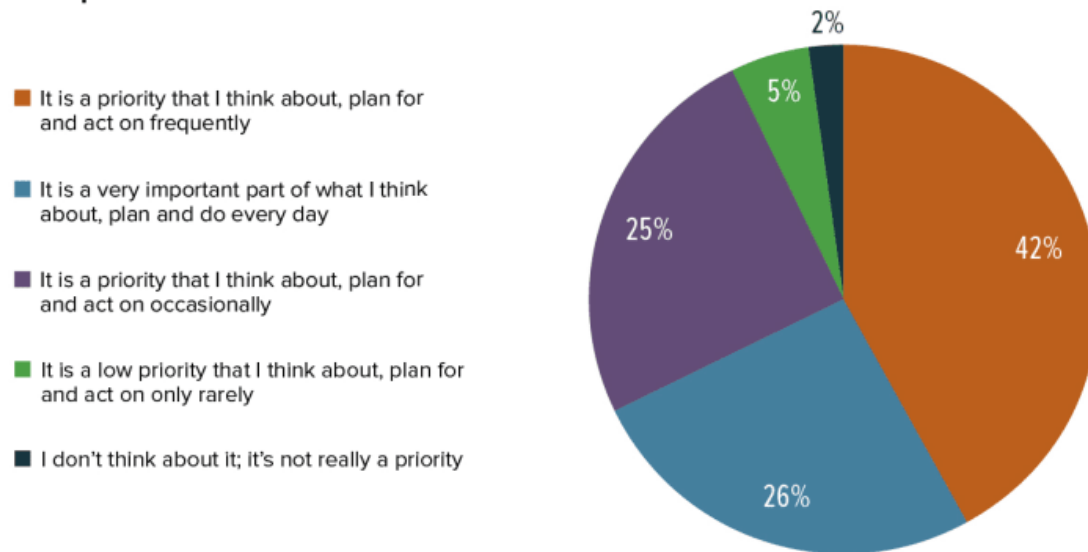
Most managers don't know how to make their team member conversations meaningful, so sometimes their actions may be interpreted as micromanaging without providing the right tools and direction.

- The goal of engagement is the professional and personal growth and development of the team member.
- People who are engaged are more successful, and success helps people engage in their work.

But mere transactions between managers and team members are not enough to maximise engagement. Team members need communication from their manager about their roles and responsibilities and what happens outside of work. An effective workplace is psychologically safe enough to experiment in, question, share information, and support one another - but none of this can happen if team members do not feel engaged.

Middle managers play a crucial role in team member engagement, creating a respectful and trusting relationship with their direct reports, communicating organisational values, and setting expectations for the organisation's day-to-day business. Studies show that people leave managers, not companies, and ensuring managers actively participate in and managing team member engagement is essential. According to a 2017 Dale Carnegie study, "Just 26% of managers surveyed say that team member engagement is a very important part of what they think about, plan, and do every day. Another 42% say they work on it frequently, and the rest only occasionally, rarely or never."

Which of the following statements best describes how engaging your employees fits into your work priorities?

- It is a priority that I think about, plan for and act on frequently
- It is a very important part of what I think about, plan and do every day
- It is a priority that I think about, plan for and act on occasionally
- It is a low priority that I think about, plan for and act on only rarely
- I don't think about it; it's not really a priority

2%
5%
25%
42%
26%

Source: Dale Carnegie Research Institute, *Employee Engagement: It's Time to Go 'All-In'* (2017).

Engagement replaces annual performance appraisals

The key reason for dropping annual appraisals is that engagement more closely follows the natural cycle of work. When rapid innovation is a source of competitive advantage, as it is now in many companies and industries, that means future needs are continually changing. Because organisations won't necessarily want employees to keep doing the same things, it doesn't make sense to hang on to a system built mainly to assess and hold people accountable for past or current practices.

As Susan Peters, GE's head of human resources has pointed out, businesses no longer have clear annual cycles. Instead, projects are short-term and tend to change along the way, so employees' goals and tasks can't be plotted out a year in advance with much accuracy. In the words of one Deloitte manager: "The conversations are more holistic. They're about goals and strengths, not just about past performance." Trust people, not policies. Reward candour and throw away the standard playbook.

While team members need to be held accountable for their results, most people perform best when given tools to succeed and coaching to improve performance. Companies that have reengineered their performance review processes and have eliminated ratings, have found substantial improvements in engagement and performance as a result.

Shifting away from annual performance appraisals toward a process of continuous coaching and development (Weekly check-ins and Quarterly coaching) requires a new role for managers. Ideally, conversations between managers and team members occur when projects finish, milestones are reached, challenges pop up, and so forth, allowing

people to solve problems in current performance while also developing skills for the future.

At most companies, managers take the lead in setting near-term goals, and employees drive career conversations throughout the year.

> Deloitte implemented a more informal "check-in" process that takes place throughout the year, with employees receiving feedback on what they're working on at any given moment. Managers were giving people instant feedback, tying it to individuals' goals.

Regular conversations about performance and development change the focus to building the workforce your organisation needs to be competitive today and years from now. Business researcher Josh Bersin estimates that about 70% of multinational companies are moving toward this model, even if they haven't arrived quite yet.

Moving away from the traditional focus on individual accountability (the annual appraisal) makes it easier to foster and evaluate teamwork especially given that the move toward team-based work often conflicted with individual appraisals and rewards. Now that the labour market has tightened and keeping good people is once again critical, many companies have been trying to eliminate "dissatisfiers" that drive team members away. Naturally, annual reviews are on that list since the process is widely reviled, and the focus on numerical ratings interferes with people's learning. Replacing this system with feedback delivered right after client engagements and project completions helps managers do better coaching and allows subordinates to process and apply the advice more effectively.

Engagement promotes feedback

A key reason team members feel disengaged is because of a lack of a manager's feedback. Team members are usually eager to share feedback with their managers and do so in the hopes of driving positive change in their workplace. However, team members feel that all too often, their feedback goes unheard and does not result in meaningful change. The bottom line? Managers aren't listening, and team members are taking notice.

Team members want to share feedback to improve the workplace.

- Most team members (78 per cent) say they're eager to take company surveys, and more than a third (38 per cent) say company surveys are the preferred method for sharing feedback.

- And yet, 50 per cent of respondents said they received no surveys from their manager in the past year.

Failure to act leads to employee dissatisfaction.

- Nearly half of respondents (45 per cent) and 40 per cent of executives don't believe their feedback leads to meaningful change.
- Forty-one per cent of all poll respondents, and 53 per cent of Millennials, say they are looking for a new job.

Employers lack the tools to analyse the data and drive change.

- Ninety-eight per cent of respondents say they always, usually, or sometimes provide responses to open-ended survey questions.
- When companies receive thousands of team members responses, it invites the question, what's being done with the data?
- These are the most time-consuming parts of surveys for team members to complete and are challenging for HR leaders to analyse, especially at an enterprise scale. Yet, the responses to these open-ended questions have the greatest potential to reveal insights that can drive meaningful change.

Engagement means giving autonomy and empowerment

Team members who do not have autonomy or empowerment require external motivation, whereas team members who do possess autonomy and empowerment do not. Autonomy and empowerment are critical attributes of high-performing teams; without them, you have frustrated team members who are constantly reminded that they're not trusted to make even small decisions let alone the bigger ones; this saps motivation and leads to resentment.

1. Worst scenario.

   Do your team members make decisions on their own? Or do you have the final say on every or most decisions? If you fall into the latter, you're hindering your team's ability to get results. If every decision must go through you, this slows workflow often with your team's work grinding to a halt. Furthermore, not allowing team members to make decisions demonstrates a lack of trust. You're telling them that you doubt their abilities to make the right choices.

2. Strengths-based autonomy and empowerment.

Providing autonomy and empowerment means understanding the strengths and skills that each team member has. For example, it means recognising that somebody in the team may understand risk analysis better than you. As a result, they're best placed to make decisions related to project risk, and it follows that you should implement this line of thinking throughout the team. If somebody has the skills needed to make decisions, allow them to do so. This extra accountability acts as a motivator and confidence builder. You're letting people do the jobs you pay them to do, which always leads to better results.

You will never have achieved high-performance leadership if you do not give up some control. As your team formation changes due to the introduction of high-performance practices, then according to the Tuckman model of team development, team behaviour is at first leadership determined. However, as it reaches the high-performance stage, behaviour is self-determined, and leadership is increasingly shared. Managers must be willing to relinquish power as the team seeks to exercise self-determination; otherwise, their strengths and skills are squandered, and they become disempowered and disengaged.

Engagement means having an open-door policy

There are only three reasons to have your office door closed:

- To tell team members to keep away from you, which you never want to do.
- To do urgent work to the extent that you cannot handle an interruption.
- To have a private conversation.
- I consider options 2 and 3 as the only valid options, and I am somewhat averse to option 3, as there should be no need for private conversations in a high-performance work environment.

Leaving your office door open always is a way of publicly and privately stating that you want people to approach you, give you unsolicited feedback or drop in for a chat. You must always be approachable; any barrier you put up is a roadblock to communicating with you; a closed-door also is a way of telling team members that they are less than you, that is, they do not command the same value as you.

Even an open-door policy is no guarantee that team members and others will come to see you; many will not come due to various reasons such as shyness, busyness, intimidation of your office and so on.

> You can't be passive about promoting communication — an open-door policy is literally the least you can do.

Your office is a barrier, with the typical office layout involving your desk being in the middle of your office and a chair close to the doorway for guests. Your chair is a seat of power between the wall and the desk. This layout creates a physical barrier between you and your team members. A person's office is often viewed as personal or even hostile territory, creating a psychological aversion to crossing through the door. The office setup supports lines of authority which usually flows downwards from the manager to the team member and not freely back.

You need to consider how you use your office:

- When feasible, I positioned my desk sideways, or so it faced a wall; this way, any team member or guest that entered to talk with me was sitting in front of me with no barriers in-between.
- If you can, have a separate side table, immediately move to it as someone enters, inviting them to join you there.
- If you do not have a side table, push your chair backwards and towards the end of your desk, removing yourself from the centre of power.
- Do not use oversized executive style chairs (despite their imposing look, they are usually the most uncomfortable and harmful for your back); instead, use a simple, small, typist chair – they are designed for comfort, are great for your back and promote good posture, plus they are on wheels and are quick and easy to move.
- A typist chair also sends out a loud message that you do not see yourself as the 'big boss'; instead, you are just like whoever has come to see you – you are on their level.

Engagement means being in contact with remote team members

Consider communication with team members who work remotely; the best way to keep in touch is about having frequent face time meetings (and six-monthly in-person meetings). When managers understand the importance of their relationship with their remote team members, they begin to individualise their approach to helping these team members achieve higher performance and encourage collaboration and teamwork.

High-performance managers need to understand that remote team members' expectations are different from office workers' expectations, especially if remote team members feel isolated, which can result in as much as a 21% drop in performance. High-performance managers can't manage the modern remote workforce using a traditional

management approach. Here are three ways to defeat isolation and increase engagement.

1. Defeat negative misperceptions of remote team members.

    A negative misperception of remote team members is that they are less productive and collaborative than office employees. High-performance managers recognise that most remote team members are mostly 25% more productive than their in-office colleagues.

2. Know your team members.

    High-performance managers need to take the time to understand their remote team members, especially how they prefer to communicate and to discover how they think and respond to specific kinds of workplace situations.

3. How to manage remote team members

    -   Identify your remote team members strengths (natural talents), so you know how they work best.
    -   Who do they prefer to work with most often?
    -   Which of their working partnerships produces the best results?

    Most important of all, however, is that in general remote team members require a higher level of trust with their manager, the best way to do this is to.

    -   Make sure the remote team member understands your expectations of them and their work. Set clear expectations indicating your attention to, understanding of and respect for their job role.
    -   Provide support, equipment, and information. It is extremely frustrating when held back by inadequate resources and support. You must ensure that remote team members have the materials, equipment, and information they need to do their job. Connect remote team members to colleagues doing similar work and ensure that remote team members are a part of team meetings to foster a sense of connectedness and belonging.

Engagement practice 1 - Weekly check-ins

Weekly check-in sessions are a vital part of the team member-manager relationship. It's where team members get individualised attention, and the manager can provide mentoring. It provides you with a management tool to develop your team members to

their fullest potential. This is a free-form meeting for all the pressing work issues, ideas and frustrations that do not fit neatly into status reports, email, and other less personal and intimate mechanisms. It means weekly status or progress reports can be dispensed with.

Regular Check-Ins help you stay in the loop, alerting you to potential problems at an early stage so that you can step, correct, or influence events before things go out of control. A general aim is to understand each other's work and personal situation and out of work stresses and obligations. The overall objective is to build a supportive and trusted relationship and discuss and influence your team members toward improved 'work performance' with positive outcomes. It is also the opportunity to:

- Motivate team members to continue a behaviour that increases their effectiveness.
- Stop a behaviour that reduces their effectiveness, especially if it turns them into a problem team member.

Giving this kind of feedback consistently and well establishes and strengthens trust. The more trust and rapport you can build, the more readily your team members will accept and act on future feedback, creating a pattern of learning and growth. It is important to have genuine conversations about performance, with the intent of getting a team member to improve, whatever their role or level of responsibility. All feedback is an opportunity to improve.

Engagement practice 2 - Quarterly mentoring

Weekly check-ins are focused on current events, whereas the quarterly mentoring session is concentrated on a team member long term professional development. The objective is to learn what drives your team members, how they want to grow professionally and how you can help.

When held consistently, such meetings further enhance the building of trust and allow team members to benefit from shared context; this also boosts team member engagement and productivity. Your aim is to understand the team members strengths and the direction they hope to go in so that you can facilitate their personal and professional growth.

Mentoring is a management skill with high potential. People never forget their most impactful mentors. New team members will see managers as the kind of person they want to be like. Mentoring is a key competency, and managers who take mentoring seriously do indeed have a profound impact.

The mentoring session nurtures the alignment between team members aspirations and organisational imperatives. They transfer their knowledge and expertise from you to the team member. Typically, you will have been in an organisation or profession longer and have greater authority within the organisation or profession than does the team member. The combination of expertise and position enables you to have a significant impact.

Mentoring helps businesses attract and retain talent and enhance organisational commitment among team members who seek developmental opportunities. Turnover decreases and development accelerates. The team member benefits in numerous ways: gaining access to management opportunities, career mobility, better rewards and higher compensation, increased adaptability when facing new situations, improved professional identity, greater professional competence, increased career satisfaction, greater acceptance within their organisation, and decreased job stress and role conflict. Studies have shown that mentors are more satisfied with their jobs and committed to their organisations than those who do not mentor.

Summary

1. **Feedback** - provide feedback, actively listen to team members, and give positive recognition, especially when taking on a leadership role.
2. **Autonomy and Empowerment** - provide team members with complete autonomy over their work and empower them to make decisions. Give them the amount of authority they need to complete the task without checking back with you on every detail.
3. **Open Door policy** - have an open-door policy making yourself 100% available to team members.
4. Remote team members – have regular check-ins with them and get to know their preferred working style.
5. **Weekly Check-In meetings** - start weekly team member check-ins, have a standing agenda focussing on current activities and issues. Establish an environment where team members are comfortable expressing their ideas.
6. **Quarterly Mentoring sessions** - start these to discuss team members professional development needs. Assign leadership roles to high-performing team members.

Weekly Check-Ins Process	1.0 hour
Set up the meeting. 1. Define the purpose of the meeting as a weekly catch-up to create a good working relationship, discuss work issues, performance, and any assistance they might need. 2. Discuss work activities, any issues and anything that you can do to help, plus any tools and training that the team member may need.	
Get to know your team member. • The purpose here is to get to know your team member better and build the foundation of your relationship; this means listening more and talking less. Below are sample questions that can be used at a first meeting. **Personal.** • What are your interests outside of work? • Tell me a little about yourself. Your past work experiences. The type of training you've completed. • Is there anything I can tell you about me? • Don't forget to answer these questions yourself.	15 minutes
Get an understanding of their current workload. 3. Ask the following types of questions. • What are your top 3 work issues? • What are your training needs? • If they brought up an issue last week and you advised them how to manage it, ask them they went. • Ask about projects, tasks they are currently involved with. • Ask what skills they feel are both used underused? • What are your strengths, the things you are naturally best at? (Strengths are not skillsets) • What motivates you? • How do you like to be recognised? • How do you like to be managed? (e.g., more structure, more autonomy, working alone, wanting to be part of a team.	30 minutes
Close the meeting. 4. These are the things you are committing to between now and the next time we meet? 5. Please ask for help as needed between now and the next time we meet? 6. Is there anything we didn't cover that you'd like to discuss next time?	15 minutes

7. I will follow up on _____ as discussed. 8. Don't also forget to offer informal, in-the-moment feedback on how they are doing, such as saying, "I think you're doing a great job." This way, they can always be confident in their performance and feel comfortable in seeking feedback.	
If you are doing team-building training. 9. At your Check-In sessions, you should impress on each team member how important it is to adopt, practice and make permanent new team building behaviours. It is strongly recommended that you repeat this message every time. Ask about team dynamics: how the team is working together, what the working relationships are like.	
Make the session a priority. 10. Try to diary at least an hour with each team member once per week or fortnightly for more experienced team members. Remember that cancelling a session is the same as saying, "I am not interested in you".	

Quarterly Mentoring Session	**1.0 hour**
Set up the first meeting. 1. As a kick-starter to your first session, ask the team member what their number one issue is. This helps break the ice, introduces your interest in work issues and the team members opinion. You can then explain why the sessions are being held to explore and develop their professional development aspirations and needs. Here are sample questions you can use at a first meeting: • Where do you see yourself in two years' time? • What are two new skills you would like to learn? • How are you progressing towards your goals? • What progress have you made on your goals over this last quarter? • How confident and aligned do you feel with where the company is going?	20 minutes
Ask performance and progress questions. 2. It's important to understand how team members feel they are progressing. Do they feel a sense of achievement? Ask questions like. • How do you feel about your performance? • Do you like working with anyone in particular? (Pairing of strengths) • Do you enjoy working on projects? • What has energised you in your role say over the last quarter? • What has challenged you over the last quarter? • What has gone well for you over the last quarter? • What's one new managerial thing you learned or observed recently?	20 minutes

• Do you feel confident in how you and the team are progressing?	
Ask "how I can help". 3. You have a role, a management responsibility to help develop your team members achieve their work goals. Ask questions like. • Do you want me to give you more work that will further develop your strengths? • What about acquiring new skills? • Is this the time for you to start a conversation about management or team building training?	15 minutes
Close the meeting. • Close the meeting with positive remarks by acknowledging the team member for something they have recently done well. • Before wrapping up the meeting, don't forget to reaffirm the value they bring. • Review any actions that you mutually agreed on, stating that you will convert them into a Development Plan. • Ensure you action the plan to give the team member every opportunity to reach their goals.	10 minutes
Schedule the next meeting for three months' time.	