

AGILE for NON-SOFTWARE TEAMS

GIL BROZA

A Practical Guide for Your Journey



Supplementary resource for the book *Agile for Non-Software Teams*. More at AgileForNonSoftwareTeams.com

How to Have One-on-One Meetings That Matter

Properly conducted, frequent one-on-one meetings between employees and their managers are vital for the employees' growth, motivation, and performance. And, if the employees work in teams (especially collaborative or Agile teams), one-on-ones can boost their team contribution.

As for the managers, effective one-on-one meetings are a key piece in doing their job successfully. After all, managers are responsible for nurturing organizational health, which is a people matter, not a process or project matter. Therefore, regular conversations with the people who report to them are critical.

Here are Gil Broza's guidelines to help both parties take responsibility for those conversations. Where indicated, a guideline applies only to managers.

Clarify and make explicit the purpose. Part of the purpose is the employee's continued growth (as a sort of personal retrospective). Another part is the manager's ability to create and sustain a trusting relationship. Think career development, obstacles, and accomplishments – not status or schedules.

Schedule the one-on-one in your calendar as a recurring activity. Once every week or two is great. Every three weeks is less valuable. 20-30 minutes per meeting should suffice. Meet away from the team space (and optionally, away from the manager's space). If meeting online, have cameras on and avoid using a blurred background. Show up on time.

Plan it out. Once the one-on-one becomes a habit, both sides might be quite comfortable with the manager starting with a general "How's it going?", "What would you like to discuss?", or "What can I help you with?" If this style feels awkward, or the meeting doesn't seem to yield much, consider a more structured approach. Prior to the meeting, both sides come up with one, two, or three *open* questions (for the employee) that will serve as the agenda and help achieve the purpose. These questions can be situational, or recur across meetings. Sample questions include:

- How have you been helping your team become better?
- With which aspects of teamwork have you been struggling?
- What aspects of the work have been particularly stimulating or exciting?
- What have you been particularly proud of since we last spoke?
- What would you like to learn next?
- Which skill or activity is turning out to be harder than you thought?
- What's getting better? What's getting worse?
- How may I support you in overcoming your obstacles?
- What would you like bring up here instead of at your team's retrospectives?

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(Manager) Allow discussion of personal matters. The employee is a whole person, so invite discussing personal matters to the extent the employee feels comfortable doing so. While employees may be cautious about sharing personal matters, remember: *everybody wants to be understood and appreciated*. Guarantee confidentiality, and reiterate your commitment to it.

(Manager) Decide whether canceling is allowed. If it is, consider applying this protocol:

- If the employee can't think of anything useful to discuss, they can say so ahead of time.
- If the manager can't think of anything useful either, the meeting can be canceled.
- Do not cancel twice in a row or more than five times a year. Remember, canceling is the exception and should come from a place of trust, not avoidance. Canceling one-on-ones can easily be seen as a signal that they're not important enough.