

Better 1:1 Conversations

A 60-minute workshop for first-time people managers. All names and situations are fictional.

AUDIENCE

First-time people managers

PERFORMANCE GAP

Weekly 1:1s have become status updates. Managers leave without understanding what is blocking progress or agreeing a next step.

LEARNING OUTCOME

Run a 20-minute 1:1 that surfaces a real obstacle, gives the colleague space to think, and ends with a specific action and follow-up.

WHAT IS IN THIS PACK

Facilitator guide / Trainer slide examples / Participant workbook / Job aid

This public example shows the format and level of detail a training project can include. Review and adapt every draft before use.

Run the session

Outcome: Run a 20-minute 1:1 that surfaces a real obstacle, gives the colleague space to think, and ends with a specific action and follow-up.

60-minute agenda

TIME	SEGMENT	FACILITATOR ACTION
0-5 min	Open	Ask participants to recall a 1:1 that helped them make progress. Capture what the manager did.
5-15 min	Model	Demonstrate a short conversation: open, explore, agree, close. Pause after each step to name the move.
15-25 min	Scenario	Read the Asha scenario. In pairs, identify the question that would uncover the real obstacle.
25-50 min	Practice	Run two 10-minute role-play rounds with 2-minute observer feedback after each round.
50-60 min	Transfer	Each manager chooses one question to use in their next 1:1 and books the follow-up.

Practice scenario

Asha says a priority is on track, but two deadlines have slipped. In the last two 1:1s she gave short updates and said everything was fine. Today you have 20 minutes together.

Facilitation instructions

Prepare

Print the workbook page and pair participants. Ask observers to watch for open questions, listening without interruption, and a clear next step. Avoid turning the exercise into a performance rating.

Open the conversation

Invite managers to ask: 'What would make this conversation useful today?' Give colleagues time to answer before moving to status. In the model demonstration, show what happens when the manager jumps to advice too early.

Explore the obstacle

Use the Asha scenario. Ask pairs to test two questions: 'What is making the deadline hard?' and 'What have you already tried?' Listen for an obstacle the colleague names, rather than one the manager assumes.

Practise and debrief

In each role-play round, the manager has ten minutes. The observer then names one moment where the manager created space to think and one moment to improve. Debrief with: What changed when you waited before offering a solution?

Transfer to work

Ask each participant to write the date of their next 1:1, one opening question, and how they will check whether the agreed action happened. Close by inviting them to share the question with a partner.

Debrief questions

What changed when you waited before offering a solution? What could you ask next time to uncover an obstacle sooner?

Slides with facilitator notes

01 / TRAINER SLIDE

A 1:1 is for progress, not reporting

- Start with what matters to the colleague
- Explore the obstacle before giving advice
- End with an action, owner and check-in

Trainer note: Ask: When does a status update become a useful conversation? Invite two examples before revealing the three moves.

02 / TRAINER SLIDE

The conversation in four moves

- Open: What would make this useful?
- Explore: What is getting in the way?
- Agree: What will you try next?
- Close: When shall we check back?

Trainer note: Model the moves in a three-minute conversation. Pause after each question and ask participants what it made possible.

03 / TRAINER SLIDE

Practice: Asha's slipping deadline

- 10 minutes: manager and colleague role-play
- 2 minutes: observer feedback
- Switch roles and repeat

Trainer note: Read the scenario aloud. Tell observers to look for one open question and one clear follow-up. Debrief: What did the manager learn that a status check would have missed?

Practise, then transfer

Use these prompts during the workshop. Bring your answers to your next real 1:1.

Before you practise

Think of your next 1:1. What is one topic that needs more than a status update?

Use the four moves

Write one question for each move: open, explore, agree and close.

After the role-play

What helped the colleague think? What will you do differently in your next real conversation?

Your next action

Date of next 1:1, question you will ask, action you will agree, and check-in date.

The four moves in a useful 1:1

01 OPEN

What would make this conversation useful today?

02 EXPLORE

What is getting in the way? What have you tried?

03 AGREE

What will you do next, and what support do you need?

04 CLOSE

When shall we check back on that action?

One check before you leave

Could the colleague name the next action, who owns it, and when you will follow up? If not, agree those details together.

Illustrative sample only. Adapt the language, timing and scenario to your learners and workplace.