

The Counter Mentor 1-on-1 Meeting “Cheat Sheet”

Q. So, what is the Counter Mentor 1-on-1 Meeting?

A. It's a communication tool. It is a scheduled, consistent, one-on-one meeting with your direct reports that uses a VERY SPECIFIC template for the conversation.

Q. What will it do for a leader?

A. It is a tool that solves most, if not all, of the major challenges that leaders encounter with regard to employees – communication challenges, performance management issues, alignment of expectations, employee feedback, forum for recognition and appreciation, and MUCH more.

Q. Why is it so effective?

A. Because it has enormous benefits for both the employee AND the leader. Done well, the CMM creates higher levels of employee engagement, a consistent opportunity to receive feedback, and a complete understanding of what it takes to succeed. For the leader, the CMM provides the ability to coach, align expectations, and provide recognition when it's deserved. It is the perfect performance management tool, allowing leaders to manage performance issues in *real-time*.

The Counter Mentor 1-on-1 Meeting (CMM)

1. Structure for the CMM

- This is a weekly one-on-one meeting with your direct reports
- The meeting is designed to last 30-40 minutes (max)
- These meetings should be a part of your weekly schedule (put them on your calendar, and don't schedule over them!)
- Don't be inconsistent; if you are, you will lose the benefits completely
- These meetings are designed to be for the *employee's* benefit. They are not designed to review projects or production; they are about creating understanding
- The leader's objective is to ask good questions, and listen *hard*

2. Objectives of the CMM

- To create (and benefit from) face-to-face communication
- To create a dialogue in which the employee is doing the majority of the talking (about 75% of the time)
- To communicate and align expectations
- To provide consistent feedback
- To create value through encouragement and recognition
- To address any performance challenges, and provide coaching and instruction

3. Benefits of the CMM

- The primary benefit of these meetings is *employee engagement* – to make your people feel valued
- The opportunity to coach performance and provide valuable feedback (*not* criticism)
- The ability to teach critical skills – thinking, planning, and leadership
- It is the very best performance management tool ever

“All employees want to feel valued, empowered, and engaged at work.
This is a fundamental need, not a generational issue.”

Mentoring Millennials

Karie Willyerd and Jeanne C. Meiser (HBR.org)

4. Typical “issues” with the CMM

- Most managers believe they don’t have enough time to do one-on-one meetings (for more details on this [grab our free step-by-step, how-to video guide](#)).
- One frequent mistake managers make is to conduct the one-on-one meeting while doing other things as well. Multi-tasking is not only a myth (performance actually *decreases*), it sends a clear message that the employee is not worth your time.
- Many managers have too many direct reports. It is nearly impossible to effectively lead and develop more than eight *direct* reports; six is ideal.
- Managers often report that, on occasion, an employee will turn the one-on-one meeting into an extended “gripe” session. Don’t dismiss the unhappy employee’s complaints, but focus on the employee’s work and what they can address and what they need to change.

“Simply put, millennials have engaged in a constant feedback loop from an early age. Given their perspective, it's understandable that this generation has an ingrained expectation for ongoing communication.”

Managers: Millennials Want Feedback, but Won't Ask for It
by Amy Adkins and Brandon Rigoni (Gallup.com)

5. The CMM Template

- Begin each meeting with some (natural) personal conversation to break the ice
- **To kick off the meeting, say: “Tell me about last week. Give me the highlights.” (REVIEW)**
 - The objective is to review the highlights of the past week, not consider every detail
 - You should listen, and clarify when necessary
 - You are looking for attitudes, impressions, and execution against the previous week’s plan
 - Looking at your notes from the previous week’s meeting, if they don’t mention a key item that was a part of their plan from the previous week, you can ask how things went
 - The easiest way to get more information about something is to use the very simple phrase, “Tell me more about that”
 - Employees (especially Millennials!) crave feedback, so this is the perfect opportunity to provide insights, encouragement, and coaching. *However, DO NOT turn the meeting into an opportunity to continually correct or criticize!*
- **Next, say: “How about next week? What are your plans and priorities?” (PREVIEW)**
 - You’re looking for the highlights; you might ask “What’s the most important thing you need to accomplish this week?”
 - Don’t *direct*; instead, ask for the employee’s plans and priorities
 - Your objective, ultimately, is to develop your employees to take control of their own plans. That will require you to train them effectively and to help them learn how to plan
 - If you see gaps in the week’s plans – something you are convinced needs to be addressed – ask about it. Like this: “I know that the marketing project has a deadline approaching in two weeks, is that something you need to address this week?”

6. Coaching in the Counter Mentor Meeting

- Always think in terms of *expectations*. When you set clear expectations, it is easier to address performance issues
- The first aspect of good coaching is to provide encouragement and recognition of excellent work. Encouragement is one of the most powerful leadership tools you have, and it costs nothing!
- When you observe an issue that needs to be addressed, simply tell the employee what you have seen and ask this question: “What happened there?”
- Again, don’t criticize performance, just ask what happened. The answers you receive will tell you a lot about the problem and the employee
- Don’t solve every problem; instead, ask for the employee’s thoughts and ideas about the solution
- When you need performance to change, create a new expectation and ask for the employee’s commitment to the expectations

“Coaching is fundamentally incompatible with multitasking, because while you may be able to hear what another person is saying while working on something else, it’s impossible to listen in a way that makes the other person feel heard.”

How Great Coaches Ask, Listen, and Empathize,
by Ed Batista (HBR.org)

7. What to Look For

The Counter Mentor 1-on-1 Meeting (CMM) is the most effective real-time performance management tool imaginable. After four meetings, you will have a very clear understanding of several things:

- Do they understand their role and responsibilities?
- Can they plan effectively?
- Do they execute their plans effectively?
- Are they committed to excellence?
- Do they respond well to training and coaching?