

The Counter Mentor 1-on-1 Meeting (CMM) Frequently Asked Questions

Q. How am I going to fit this into my ridiculous schedule?

This is easily the most common question we receive regarding the Counter Mentor Meeting. When managers are already dealing with 50 to 60-hour weeks (or more!), their first concern is finding time to do the meeting. After all, just six direct reports can easily chew up four hours!

However, you are already committing this time to employees throughout the dozens of impromptu meeting, emails, and texts that are already being sent back and forth to deal with the concerns and issues that come up every week. And, unfortunately, you're not getting any of the enormous performance management benefits of the CMM!

First things first... schedule your 1-on-1 meetings. Put them on your calendar and DO NOT schedule over them! Of course, you may *occasionally* have to reschedule, but it should be the exception.

What you will find very quickly is that the time you invest in these meetings will repay you many times over in time you get back as you avoid the problems created when you don't communicate effectively

Remember, leadership is pay-me-now or pay-me-later (many times over).

Q. How do I do the first 1-on-1 Meeting™?

The first meeting may be a bit tricky if your direct reports are rarely called into a one-on-one meeting with you. They may think they've done something wrong – or worse.

To offset any potential concerns, announce the 1-on-1 meetings to your team in a staff meeting. Indicate that you believe communication is extremely important and you're committed to improving your communication with the objective of becoming a more effective leader.

Tell your employees that this will be *their* meeting; a meeting where they will have access to you, provide input regarding their work, and ask for feedback regarding their performance. Tell them you will mostly be listening and finding ways to help.

This short explanation may lead to a few questions, but nothing you should be able to easily answer. Once the meetings begin, your employees will know exactly what is going on.

Q. Where do we have the meeting?

In our experience, the first couple of meeting are easier if you have them in a conference room or some place that isn't your office. As they get comfortable with the process, employees will have no problems meeting in your office, but early on – especially if you're not in the habit of meeting with employees – it is probably easier if you meet in an environment that doesn't add to the stress of doing something new.

Q. Won't employees think I'm micro-managing them?

On very rare occasions, we are told that an employee feels like the CMM is an attempt to micromanage. However, the 1-on-1 meeting is for the employee, driven by the employee, and focused on the employee. Your role as leader is to ask what *their* plans and priorities are. Your role is to provide encouragement and offer support. Your role is to listen.

That said, we have had managers turn the 1-on-1 meeting into the 1-on-1 *beating* simply by focusing on the negative (criticism), telling the employee how to fix everything, and dictating what the employee should be doing next. If that happens, you may very well be using the CMM as a tool to micromanage and you need to STOP!

Q. What if I have more than 6 direct reports?

Span of control is a very important issue, especially relative to the CMM. Leadership is not about the number of people who work for you, it is about the number of people you can influence and develop. Research has long indicated that the appropriate span of control is optimally in the 4-6 employee range. If you have seven or eight employees you can manage, but it's not ideal.

On the other hand, you may have 10 or 15, or even more! This becomes a real problem, and the level of employee engagement will suffer over time. If you have that many employees and you cannot create "team leaders" or something similar, then one-on-one meetings will be very difficult to sustain. We would suggest that you meet with half of those employees in weeks 1 and 3, and the other half in weeks 2 and 4.

Although that is not the perfect scenario, two meetings per month will still provide enormous benefits. In the meantime, lobby hard to have the corporate structure changed to create about six direct reports!

Q. What if the employee is non-responsive? Or has very little to say?

This generally means one of two things: First, it may mean that you have an employee who has a "reserved" behavioral style (S or C in the DiSC® model) and you have yet to develop a relationship in which they feel comfortable answering questions and providing input. Second, it often means that your current relationship with that employee is not in the best shape and you may have to backtrack and rehabilitate a bit.

In either case, gentle prods will help. Ask leading questions like, "What was the highlight of the week last week?" or "What customer issues did you encounter last week?" Or, you might say "Tell me something positive about last week." Or you might say, "I know you do very similar things each week, but what is the most difficult thing you have to do in your role?"

Don't accept one-word or one-sentence answers (unless completely appropriate, based on the question). Instead, just say "Tell me more about that."

Q. What if the employee turns the meeting into a gripe-fest, or, a psychotherapy session?

It happens. Sometimes, employees need to vent, or they have an issue with something, or they decide to tell you *way* more than you need to know about something personal. To deal with this effectively, make sure you set boundaries and hold to them.

From the very beginning, make sure that the employee knows that each meeting will last 30 minutes – period. Next, make sure you very gently and respectfully end the meeting at 30 minutes. If you don't, you'll never be able to get those meetings back to where they need to be. Finally, when a specific subject comes up that needs to be discussed (a bad relationship with a fellow employee, for example), but needs more time and attention, simply agree to have a separate meeting (not a CMM meeting) to handle the issue. Schedule it on the spot, and make sure you don't cancel it! If necessary, involve HR or another manager in that discussion.

One thing that is important to understand is that “home” problems almost always come to work. Employee performance is frequently impacted by those problems and you **MUST** address them. By “addressing” the problem, however, we mean you need to *listen* and *understand*, not become a professional psychotherapist.

In some cases, you may need to allow the employee some time to deal with an important home issue. Tell them you need them at their very best and their performance is very important to the team's success. Tell them you are happy to help and support them as much as is possible, but there is still a responsibility to do a good job in their position.

Typically, this will handle the vast majority of issues you encounter.