



QUANTUM  
WORKPLACE

# ONE-ON-ONE MEETING GUIDE

How to Navigate Conversations During the  
COVID-19 Pandemic

# IT'S TIME TO TALK.

As the COVID-19 crisis evolves, we know one of your top priorities is to ensure that your workforce continues to feel supported and safe. One of the best ways to do this is through one-on-one conversations.

Your managers have a lot on their plate right now, so it's important they feel informed and empowered to act. It's even more crucial that they understand the importance of effectively checking in with employees, managing negative emotions, answering tough questions, and addressing pressing concerns during uncertain times like this.

## WE'RE HERE TO HELP.

Our mission is to make work better every day. It's a challenging time for that, we know. But we're committed to your success, and we are here to help. Consider this an HR and manager guide to navigating conversations during the COVID-19 pandemic. It contains:

- 5 reasons to conduct one-on-ones during a crisis
- 3 myths about having conversations during difficult times
- Manager tips for critical conversations
- 5 one-on-one templates for honest conversations during the COVID-19 pandemic

Health organizations like the CDC and WHO recommend employees work from home if possible. We completely agree! But that social distancing also makes meaningful one-on-one meetings even more important. Leverage free tools like Slack, Zoom, or GotoMeeting to conduct these critical one-on-one meetings face-to-face.

# 5 REASONS TO CONDUCT 1-ON-1S DURING A TIME OF CRISIS

Your employees, managers, and workplaces have been completely disrupted -- is now really the best time to ask them to have a conversation? Yes.

Connecting with employees is critical to keeping them engaged and productive, now more than ever. Frequent and regular conversations will give your managers a better understanding of how employees are feeling, what obstacles stand in their way, and how the organization can help them be successful.

Here are 5 reasons to conduct manager-employee one-on-one conversations during this time of crisis:

- 1. Show employees their manager cares.** Everyone wants to know their opinions are valued and their needs are being considered. Taking the time to sit down with employees one-on-one shows them that their manager cares. It creates meaningful, open lines of communication between leaders and their direct reports.
- 2. Better understand unique employee needs and emotions.** While collecting feedback through surveys, chat apps, or email can be extremely valuable, one-on-one conversations help add color to the picture. Additional context, like body language and facial queues, can help you pick up on something that may have gone unnoticed in written form.
- 3. Deep dive into critical issues before they become problems.** The COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving, and will probably continue to do so over the next several weeks. Managers should be surfacing, dissecting, and responding to critical issues as they come up. Staying in tune with employees through one-on-ones is key.
- 4. Foster a culture of trust and feedback.** Feedback loops help break down walls that prevent necessary and invaluable communication. Open dialogue empowers employees to share their thoughts, creating a stronger and more united workplace (even when you're not all physically in one place).
- 5. Stay focused on the future.** As abrupt and disruptive as COVID-19 has been, we will get through this. Continuous conversations focused on employee appreciation, growth, performance, and feedback can help keep your employees set on the future and reassure them of their fit and impact.

# 3 MYTHS ABOUT HAVING 1-ON-1S DURING DIFFICULT TIMES

Conducting a one-on-one during a global pandemic and bleak economic circumstances can be really, really scary -- especially for a new or inexperienced manager. We want to help ease their anxiety by squashing a few misunderstood myths about having one-on-ones during difficult times.

## **1. This conversation will be way more difficult than other one-on-ones.**

The truth here is that all one-on-one meetings are hard. Any manager-employee conversation requires effective communication and soft skills--which are often not natural talents for most managers. While the circumstances of this conversation are different, the principles are still the same (check out the six tips on the next page).

## **2. A conversation at a time like this could breed unrealistic expectations.**

Managers can be wary of conducting a one-on-one meeting during times of crisis because they don't want to open the door for unrealistic expectations.

*"What if they ask for something I can't deliver?"*

Your employees can't have everything they want--and they know that. But they should still feel safe and comfortable communicating their needs and wants, especially during times of great uncertainty and fear. They deserve to know what's possible and what isn't. Managers should be able to receive requests confidently--and clearly communicate what they can and cannot do to help.

## **3. Managers have to have all the answers before having this conversation.**

Managers tend to get in their own heads about one-on-one meetings. They think they need to know all the answers to every question and fear looking inadequate to their direct reports. This isn't true, even in the most difficult times. Employees know that their managers are human, and they don't expect managers to have all the answers all the time.

# MANAGER TIPS FOR CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS

Cultivating strong manager-employee relationships is critical—especially during a crisis.

Managers and employees need to stay connected and aligned. In addition to regular check-ins and performance conversations, managers should be discussing the crisis at hand with each individual to gather perceptions and feedback.

Here are some critical tips to guide managers in these conversations:

- **Be intentional.** One-on-one meetings should have a clear focus and agenda. Be intentional about what you discuss and how you present questions and feedback. Treat every meeting as an opportunity to build trust.
- **Be personal.** Your employees aren't robots, and this is a difficult time for everyone. Treat your employees as humans, and tailor your discussions to each individual. Try to really understand who they are, what makes them tick, and what their concerns are.
- **Be honest.** It's best to say what you mean and mean what you say. Be vulnerable with your employees—they know you're not perfect. Share information as soon as you're cleared to share it, and don't be afraid to say, "I don't know, but I'll get back to you."
- **Be kind.** Feedback is important, but it can be difficult to give and receive. Any response or feedback should come from a place of caring. Be considerate with your delivery in these conversations and be understanding that this is an emotional time for everyone.
- **Be clear.** Some of your conversations will be uncomfortable, but you need to communicate clearly and confidently. The best way to do this is to plan for these conversations and understand the key messages you want to convey.
- **Be present.** It's easy to be distracted in a time like this, but do your best to stay focused on the other person. Turn off your phone, mute notifications, and be a good listener. Probe deeper with questions and listen actively.



# **5 TEMPLATES FOR HONEST CONVERSATIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

# AD HOC CONVERSATIONS

Ad hoc conversations are lightweight, any-time conversations between managers and employees. Establishing this as a formal conversation type in your organization can create an “open-door” policy for managers and employees, even if most of your workforce is remote. Although these conversations have little to no planning or prep time, it’s smart to have a bank of questions to refer to when needed.

- How are you feeling today?
- How are your family and friends?
- What have you been gathering from the news?
- What are you most concerned about?
- How can I help alleviate your concerns?
- What questions can I answer?
- What are you focused on today?
- What’s been going well? What hasn’t?
- What’s gotten in your way?

# WEEKLY PROGRESS UPDATE

As your workforce becomes more dispersed and disconnected, staying in tune with employees' progress on tasks and workloads becomes even more essential. We recommend holding these conversations weekly, if not more often.

- What's going well with your current projects and tasks?
- What's not going well with your current projects and tasks?
- What are your current priorities? Have they changed?
- How would you describe your current workload?
- What can I do to support you on your current projects and tasks?
- Do you have the materials, equipment, and technology you need to stay on track?
- How do you think your current working conditions have affected your day-to-day workflow?
- What barriers or challenges do you have that I should be aware of?
- What flexibility (if any) do you need that this time?
- What additional resources do you need to work effectively in these conditions?
- Have your perceptions of the circumstances changed since last week? How so?
- What questions do you have about our recent company/team updates?
- Do you feel like you're receiving clear, timely, and effective communication?  
How could it be better?
- What can I do to better support you during this time?



# MONTHLY PERFORMANCE CHECK-IN

Even in difficult times, conversations centered around performance should still be a priority. We recommend making time for performance check-ins monthly to stay in tune with employee obstacles, opportunities, and goals.

- Where do your goals stand?
- What were the highlights of your past month?
- What did not go well last month?
- What are you most proud of?
- Where could you improve?
- What opportunities do you want to seize?
- What does success look like next month? Next quarter?
- What is keeping you from accomplishing your work?
- What barriers stand in your way of success?
- How have you been prioritizing professional growth?
- What have you learned? How does it apply to your current responsibilities?

# EMERGENCY/CRISIS MANAGEMENT CONVERSATION

While we suggest discussing how the environment is impacting employees in regular scheduled conversations, in extreme times like these, we also recommended having a conversation specific to emergency and crisis management. Ask your employees these questions during times of uncertainty.

- Do you feel well-supported in our organization at this time?
- Do you feel well-supported by me at this time?
- Has the frequency of communication from leaders been effective?
- Has the communication from leaders helped you feel informed?

# REMOTE WORK READINESS CONVERSATION

Are your employees gearing up to or already working remote? Schedule a specific one-on-one conversation to uncover and address any remote work concerns.

- Do you have the materials and equipment you need to perform effectively at home?
- Do you have the technology you need to stay connected to me and our team when working remotely?
- What impact has working remotely had on your day-to-day performance?
- What additional resources do you need to work effectively while remote?



# CONCLUSION

We want to help you continue to make work better every day, even when there are circumstances that make this challenging.

Conducting one-on-one meetings with your employees during this chaotic and uncertain time is critical to the success of your employees, your teams, and your organization.

**We have a variety of resources available to help you navigate these uncertain times. We invite you to read, download, and share them with your team.**

**[VIEW MORE RESOURCES](#)**

**We're all in this together. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at [hello@quantumworkplace.com](mailto:hello@quantumworkplace.com).**