Breakthrough 1:1's

By Amie Gamboian, CEO/Executive Coach

Clients frequently ask me for strategies to improve 1:1's, seeking growth in their leadership and higher performance from team members. This not only directly and practically improves leadership and employee engagement, but also fosters a true internal coaching culture, a critical inch to becoming a healthy organization.

Many pose the question out of frustration and simply needing a higher return on the resource investment. Let me assure you, few things are more practical and relevant to your team's success than holding highly effective 1:1's.

I encourage you to pay attention to three factors that contribute to job dissatisfaction as you strategically shape the 1:1's happening on your team and in your organization. You can leverage exceptional 1:1's to combat the three job killers of anonymity, irrelevance and immeasurability. Remember, not every conversation will be life-changing, but each one has the *potential* to be.

Three simple elements make the difference in creating breakthrough 1:1's:

1. **Eliminating ANONYMITY by making 1:1's PERSONAL**.
   Following a rhythm or format is fine, until you lose the personal connection and the conversation becomes only "shop talk" or more like a box checked than a dialogue or person you're investing in. Remember, people aren't tasks and they don't want to feel like one. Team members need to be known, seen and heard.

   Show you care by starting each 1:1 with a personal connect, briefly checking in on something that's important in his/her personal life or seeking to learn something new about him/her. You'll come to know your people much better, preventing the feeling of anonymity so many have in todays' workplace.

   Following a duplicatable conversation structure is strategic as long as it doesn't prevent personal emphasis. Excellent coaching conversations are customized according to need, fueled by great questions, and sprinkled with truth telling that's timed with precision like a surgeon.

2. **Eradicating IRRELEVANCE by focusing on PERFORMANCE**.
   We all need to know how we're doing and to be held accountable. One of the strongest human needs is significance, and people find all kinds of ways – both positive and negative - to experience it. When the feeling of irrelevance kicks in and people don't understand how their work contributes to the greater vision and purpose, buy in and engagement rapidly decrease. It's the job of a leader to be the CRO, Chief Reminding Officer, continuously reminding people that their work is relevant and makes a difference.

   You can really win by appreciating the contributions that may seem meaningless or mundane, and by mastering the art of praising the person, not their achievements. Even when results may change, character remains (we hope!). Team members may not be able to go back to an old win, but they can indeed dig deep into the character traits that positioned them there in the first place and press "repeat".

Performance that gets recognized must be mission-centric, with vision, values and behaviors all tapped. It's simple to reinforce these in conversations and expand the impact of positive mindsets and behaviors on your overall culture.

3. **Removing IMMEASURABILITY by investing in DEVELOPMENT**.
   Growth doesn't just happen; it's highly intentional. It's easy to falsely assume team members are growing, have goals and are following a development plan; however, most need a champion who helps them anticipate areas of growth and create a plan to get there.

   Everyone can win somewhere. Holding high standards, while rejecting stagnation and complacency, is a hallmark of the highest performing teams. This "real time" mindset fosters a continuous cycle of ongoing development, benefitting from both successes and failures.

   Annual reviews should be used less as a long gaze in the rearview mirror and more as a launching pad for growth, focusing on specific areas of skill development and character that will advance both quantitative and qualitative measurements. Development is all about who we're becoming, which ultimately determines what is achieved.

The most common mistakes to avoid with 1:1's:
- Cancelling or continuously rescheduling
- Late starts/stops
- Doing too much talking and too little listening
- Making it all about work and "shop talk"
- Getting off key objectives
- Not asking for feedback
- Failing to balance telling vs. asking

Improving the effectiveness of 1:1's is one of the simplest ways to develop a high performing team. These are conversations and team members worth investing in. Ensuring that personal, performance and development are all included in your 1:1's will help plug any potential leaks related to anonymity, irrelevance and immeasurability.