

Volume 28

What I'm hearing

"What is the compelling reason to do regular one-on-ones with your team? I have peers who don't see the value in it."

What it means

One of the chief challenges of leadership is competing priorities. One mark of maturing leaders is their ability to tell me what they believe, and how that drives their priorities and habits.

I don't subscribe to a one-size-fits-all philosophy with regard to leadership habits. If you have more than 10 direct reports, it's almost impossible to do one-on-ones more than bi- or tri-monthly.

When confronted with the above question, I ask the following:

- What do you believe are the priorities of an effective leader?
- What do you believe your people need from you?
- How do those priorities inform your habits and routines as a leader?

What you should do

As a leader, at some point you must decide what you believe leadership is. Only then can you begin the journey toward developing the skills and experience you need to lead based on that conviction, and not based on what you're told or what kind of leadership you're receiving.

I offer two thoughts on the business case for one-on-ones:

1. The Gallup Organization did some great research (nicely compiled and interpreted in the 1999 book *First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently* by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman) connecting employee perceptions to customer satisfaction, profitability, productivity and turnover. Good things happened for businesses when employees agreed strongly with the statements:

- I know what is expected of me at work.
- My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.

2. Research by Frederick Herzberg identifies achievement, recognition, the work itself and responsibility as the top four intrinsic factors in employee motivation.

I believe that the top priority of an effective leader is to maximize organizational performance, a goal that can be achieved only through his/her people. People will do more of what is asked of them if they feel a deeper connection to their organization or team, and if they see their needs being addressed. Gallup, Herzberg and a host of other researchers have confirmed this. It's not easy to balance the needs of individuals and the needs of the organization, but that's what leaders are tasked with.

The final questions I ask leaders in exploring the relevance of one-on-ones are:

- How do you measure success?
- For each person on your team: How does s/he measure success? What does s/he need from you right now? What are his/her key personal and professional goals right now?

I submit that effective leadership is tied to having conversations focused on continually reviewing the needs of the organization, understanding the needs of the individual, and dealing directly with any misalignment that surfaces between the two. The one-on-one isn't the only leadership habit that meets this fundamental need, but it is the most direct way to address the needs of both the business and the individual.

Is this a conversation that you want to explore more? Do you see an opportunity to build this habit into the leadership norms in your organization? This is a conversation I always look forward to having. Contact me. scott@thetrugroup.com

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