

LEADERSHIP GUIDE

# High Impact One-on-Ones

The Most Underrated Leadership  
Skill in Government

# The Challenges for Leaders in Government

Across the public sector, leaders are under pressure. They're expected to deliver more outcomes with fewer resources, while meeting higher standards for transparency, accountability, and speed. With so much noise, genuine connection with team members often slips down the priority list. Emails, meetings, and reports take over, and the conversations that build trust,

clarify focus, and resolve challenges disappear. When this happens:

- » Trust erodes
- » Teams tread water and fail to progress
- » Leaders become frustrated
- » Productivity drops
- » Teams shift from growth to survival mode

Leaders feel stretched and fatigued, pulled between delivery

and supporting their people. In the current environment, genuine connection between leaders and their employees isn't optional: it's the anchor that keeps performance steady and teams cohesive when everything else feels stretched.

The solution isn't more control or more meetings – it's better-quality one-on-one conversations with your team members.

**Leaders don't build trust through KPI reports – they build it through real conversations.**



## Why Every Leader Needs to Host High Impact One-on-Ones

A regular, structured one-on-one between a leader and a team member is the simplest, fastest, and most powerful way to lift performance, strengthen engagement, and align effort to outcomes. If you need to improve performance, productivity, or morale in your team, start here.

## What Outcome Do High Impact One-on-Ones Deliver?

**The best leaders don't wait for performance reviews to talk about performance – they create a rhythm of meaningful conversation.**

- » Increased productivity and engagement
- » Greater clarity on priorities
- » Improved accountability
- » Real-time capability growth
- » Early visibility of risks and challenges

The research is clear:

- Gallup found that employees who have regular 1:1s are almost three times more likely to be engaged and 56% less likely to be job hunting.<sup>1</sup>
- Harvard Business Review calls consistent check-ins one of the strongest predictors of team performance and retention.<sup>2</sup>



# Are Your One-on-Ones High Impact or Low Impact?

Every one-on-one sends a message – what is yours saying? Some create clarity, energy, and accountability. Others drain time and motivation.

## Low Impact One-on-Ones

If your one-on-ones feel rushed, repetitive, or disconnected from outcomes, they may be doing more harm than good. Low impact meetings focus on updates, not growth, and rarely spark meaningful conversation.

### Ask yourself:

- » Do they feel transactional or rushed?
- » Do I come in with a clear purpose?
- » Are they linked to outcomes, or just covering admin?

### Low impact one-on-ones tend to:

- » Be transactional and task-focused
- » Lack structure or agenda
- » Drift into admin or irrelevant detail
- » Miss connection to outcomes
- » Be reactive or underprepared
- » Avoid reflection or coaching
- » End without clear actions

**A rushed or unfocused one-on-one quietly communicates to your team member – they're not a priority**

## High Impact One-on-Ones

High impact one-on-ones are intentional, structured, and human. They build trust, connection, and performance – turning every meeting into a growth moment.

### Ask yourself:

- » Do people leave clearer and more motivated?
- » Do we talk about learning, not just deadlines?
- » Do I listen more than I speak?
- » Do we finish with clarity and next steps?

### High impact one-on-ones:

- » Are planned and purposeful
- » Begin with genuine curiosity and care
- » Link to goals and outcomes
- » Use open, coaching-style questions
- » Surface challenges early and explore solutions
- » Recognise wins and learning
- » Invite two-way feedback
- » End with clarity, focus, and ownership

**High impact one-on-ones turn check-ins into powerful coaching conversations that grow people and performance.**

## Quick Self-Check

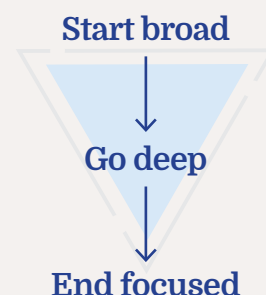
Ask Yourself	Low Impact	High Impact
Purpose	<i>Am I just collecting updates?</i>	<i>Am I helping this person grow?</i>
Style	<i>Do I show up rushed or distracted?</i>	<i>Do I come prepared and present?</i>
Focus	<i>Are we just ticking off tasks?</i>	<i>Are we discussing learning and results?</i>
Tone	<i>Is it a report-out?</i>	<i>Is it a coaching conversation?</i>
Agenda	<i>Do I wing it?</i>	<i>Do I follow a structure?</i>
Mindset	<i>Am I doing all the talking?</i>	<i>Am I asking empowering questions?</i>
Outcome	<i>Do they leave unclear or drained?</i>	<i>Do they leave clear and energised?</i>

## How to Host a High Impact One-on-One

Using the Kingston Human Capital Inverted Triangle Framework for High Impact One-on-Ones, high impact one-on-ones follow a simple rhythm:

**» Start broad » Go deep » End focused**

This approach creates space for connection first, coaching next, and accountability, ensuring every conversation builds clarity, capability, and trust.



# The Six Steps in a High Impact One-on-One



## ① Connect First: “What’s on your mind or agenda today?”

**Start broad, with care and curiosity.** Ask how they’re really going, not just what they’re working on. This connection builds trust and signals genuine interest.

**Leader tip:** Start with warmth and openness. “How are you really?” or “What’s been on your radar this week?”



## ② Progress Check: “What’s going well?”

**Celebrate wins and recognise effort.** Acknowledging progress builds confidence, reinforces the right behaviours, and sets a positive tone for the discussion.

**Ask:** “What are you most proud of since we last spoke?” or “What worked well and why?”



## ③ Challenges: “What’s getting in your way?”

**Surface blockers without blame.** Encourage your team member to reflect honestly on what’s holding progress back. Stay curious, not critical.

**Ask:** “What’s feeling harder than it should?” or “What do you think is slowing things down?”



## ④ Thinking Through Solutions (Use the GROW model)

**Guide their thinking instead of solving the problem for them.** Use questions that help your team member explore options, make decisions, and take ownership.

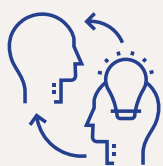
**G – Goal:** “What would success look like here?”

**R – Reality:** “What’s happening right now?”

**O – Options:** “What could you try differently?”

**W – Way Forward:** “What’s your next step?”

**Leader tip:** Resist the urge to jump in with answers. Coaching is about helping people think – not thinking for them.



## ⑤ Feedback Both Ways

**Offer clear, timely, and balanced feedback, and invite theirs in return.** Two-way feedback builds mutual trust, improves performance, and strengthens relationships.

**Ask:** “Here’s one thing you’re doing really well...”, “Here’s one area to focus on improving...” or “What’s one thing I could do better to support you?”



## ⑥ Action Plan and Focus

**End with clarity and commitment.** Summarise key outcomes, next steps, and the support they’ll need to move forward.

**Ask:** “Between now and our next one-on-one, what are your top two priorities?”, or “What support do you need from me?”

**“A great one-on-one ends  
with clarity, not confusion.”**

*Michelle Bassett, Director, Kingston Human Capital*



# Adopting a Coaching Mindset

High impact one-on-ones are built on a coaching mindset, not a command-and-control approach. The goal is to build capability, not dependency. Great leaders don't fix problems – they grow the people who can.

## A Coaching Mindset Means:

- » Listening more than you talk
- » Asking before advising
- » Encouraging ownership instead of giving orders

Michael Bungay Stanier calls this approach “Say less, ask more.”<sup>3</sup> It's how great leaders turn conversations into capability.

## Coaching Reflection

After each one-on-one, ask yourself:

- » Did I listen more than I spoke?
- » Did I ask open, growth-oriented questions?
- » Did I help them think for themselves?
- » Did I create psychological safety for honesty?

**Your tone and curiosity create the safety that lets truth surface.**



Small acts of follow through build enormous trust

## Building Accountability and Follow Through

The real impact of a one-on-one happens *after* the meeting – when both leader and team member follow through.

### Leader Follow Up

- » Send a short recap email (3-5 lines)
- » Note key actions, owners, and deadlines
- » Check progress informally between meetings
- » Revisit previous notes next time to show care and continuity

### Team Member Follow Up

Encourage your team members to:

- » Capture and track agreed actions
- » Share mid-cycle updates
- » Reflect on what's working or what they've learned

## Conclusion: Reflect and Take Action Today

High impact one-on-ones aren't a time cost – they're an investment in capability, clarity, and culture. They're how leaders turn busy teams into focused, engaged, and accountable ones.

### Self-Reflection

1. When was your last one-on-one with each team member?
2. How many of them felt truly high impact?
3. What's one behaviour you'll change this week to make them better?

### Take Action

- » Book your next one-on-one
- » Prepare with purpose
- » Be fully present
- » Follow through

**When your one-on-ones have structure, your people feel supported and inspired.**



### References

- <sup>1</sup> Gallup, *State of the Global Workplace* (2024)
- <sup>2</sup> Harvard Business Review, *The Power of Check-Ins* (2023)
- <sup>3</sup> Bungay Stanier, M. *The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More* (2016)

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## Leadership Training and Development with Kingston Human Capital

We help public sector leaders master the art of high impact one-on-ones through our Leadership Training Workshops. These sessions are practical, hands-on, and tailored to the realities of government leadership. In this workshop (limited to 12 leaders), you'll learn how to:

- » Structure meaningful one-on-ones that motivate and engage
- » Use the *GROW* model to turn every conversation into progress
- » Lift performance and accountability – without micro-managing

### Our Promise

If you don't leave confident to lead better one-on-ones, we'll refund your ticket – no questions asked.

**Book now:** [www.kingstonhumancapital.com.au/training](http://www.kingstonhumancapital.com.au/training)

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