

The Mentor Minute

Canada's leading consultants share their favourite tips and techniques.

Kathleen Redmond supports leaders in developing effective, engaging, performance-driven communication. A certified coach and trainer with over 25 years of experience, Kathleen focuses on the character requirement to inspire teams, increase engagement and produce results. Kathleen's latest book, Leadership by Engagement: Leading Through Authentic Character to Attract, Retain, and Energize, has its official launch on September 23, 2008. For more news about the launch visit www.centreforcharacterleadership.com.

Find Kathleen at:

Email:
kr@centreforcharacterleadership.com

Tel: 905.478.7962

Engaging One-on-One

with Kathleen Redmond, author, coach, champion of character and authenticity

If an employee voice falls in the office does anybody hear it? Too often leaders are missing opportunities to get to know their team members and their workplace concerns. Unfortunately, many managers avoid one-on-one discussions with those whom they took the time to interview and hire, and in doing so avoid one of the best ways to engage them.

Engagement is necessary for effective leadership, and character is necessary for true engagement. By sitting down regularly with your people, you will get to know them, and they will see your character and your concern for their success – which will gain their trust. For some, however, the one-on-one is an awkward exchange at best, but it needn't be. Here are some quick tips for turning a one-on-one into a win-win:

Invite: Select a convenient time and place to meet your team member. In today's busy work environment, a distracted employee won't open up unless he or she is comfortable. Let the person know that it's okay to be forthright.

Listen: Practice open listening. Truly hear what the person is saying, without jumping in and imposing suggestions or solutions. The point of the one-on-one is for the individual to take ownership of challenges.

Acknowledge: Pay attention to what is being said, and how. By picking up on tone of voice and body language you will be better able show empathy and respect for what the person is saying by acknowledging it. Caring is not at odds with business, it is the foundation of building trust in business.

Ask: Summon solutions from the person, and then explore the pros and cons of each. An employee who learns to solve his or her own problems will feel an increased sense of engagement in your organization. And, engagement can be self-perpetuating.

Continue: Work with the person to form a SMART action plan: Specific, Measurable, Accountable, Realistic, and Time Bound. Be sure to document the plan and set the time for another one-on-one. Continual follow-up is necessary to monitor the employee's progress and to help maintain engagement.

By following these steps you will earn the trust of your employees, enhance engagement, and see the immediate and long-term results of your leadership efforts. Not only will you be helping your employees, but you will also be helping yourself by minimizing the stress of sit-downs and thereby boosting your own engagement. Taking the time to listen to even one voice is a first step to a powerful win-win for you and your team.

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