

Building Relationships: The One-to-One

What a one-to-one meeting is not:

- It is not selling anything.
- It is not an opportunity to plead for participation.
- It is not chit-chat.
- It is not an occasion for you, as the initiator, to describe your anxieties, your needs or your agenda.
- It is not an occasion to pry into the private life of another person.

What the one-to-one meeting is:

- It is a 30- to 45-minute opportunity to set aside the pressures of issues and tasks and immediate crises and to probe for the thoughts, dreams and visions of a leader.
- It is a listening session where the most important questions are not what or who or when but why? The “why” question tends to get at the personal grounding of public action or inaction. This personal grounding usually is contained in a story—not in a general theory.
- A one-to-one has three purposes: to open up a public relationship with someone, to better understand someone's self interest, and to get clarity about why the person does—and has done—what they've done.

How do I go about a one-to-one?

The phone call

- Give your name and your title, and state what you want: a 30-minute meeting to hear their views about the school and community. Set the specific appointment. (Note: Don't get into a long discussion on the phone. Don't do the interview itself on the phone.)

The interview

Opening [2–5 minutes]

- Introduce yourself.
- Explain the context for you reaching out (For example, you are having a series of meetings with key leaders).
- Restate your purpose for wanting to connect (For example, “This is really a chance for me to hear how you think about the community, the area, the future—away from the normal stress of tasks and events and crisis.” Or: “I'm not here to ask you to do anything. I'm more interested in how you see things and why.”).

Continued on back



Middle [15–20 minutes]

- The focus is on them—their interests, their visions, their ideas, their stories.
- But you cannot be a sponge. You have to probe, question, be silent at times.
- The key question here tends to be why. (For example: “You know, Ms. _____, you’ve been active in this school/community for 20 years and I’ve never asked you why you first got involved?” Or: “Why is it that you invest in the school or your community and so many people don’t?” Or “Do you enjoy working with the community or school, and what could we do to make sure other people enjoy it?”)
- You are probing for depth, for personal grounding of public action. You are encouraging reflection, because when people reconnect to the real roots of their relationship to a school/community or other important experiences, then you understand better why they do what they do and you can ask yourself how can we recreate some of those fundamental formative experiences for new leaders.

End [5–6 minutes]

- “Do you have any questions for me?”
- “Who else should I talk to?”
- Set up another meeting, if appropriate.

Evaluation (Do this after your meeting with the person)

- Ask yourself a series of questions:
 - *Does this person have any anger? A sense of grief, memory and vision and healthy tension?*
 - *Who does the person see as leaders? Who did the person refer me to?*
 - *Did the person ask me anything? Was the person properly wary? Was the person curious?*
 - *How would this person work with other leaders and potential leaders? Is this a person I should see again?*
 - *What would this person bring to the building of our organization?*
 - *Does this person have so many personal problems that he or she could not possibly contribute and participate?*
- Finally, evaluate yourself.
 - *Did you probe?*
 - *Did you get beyond generalities?*
 - *Did you push too far?*
 - *Did you feel any healthy tension?*
 - *Did they?*
 - *What kind of impression do you think you made on this person about what kind of person you are?*