

One of the most neglected and underused resources in business.

There's a reason we don't have more one-to-one meetings.

Of these two alternatives, which do you think has more impact: less time with more people or more time with less people? Which creates greater ROI?

Our culture and marketplace seem to be heavily swayed toward less time with more people (group meetings, text messages, email, social media, etc.). You can reach out to thousands of people in seconds, but to what level of influence? To what end? What depth?

This whitepaper is about the latter option, **more time with less people**, for two primary reasons:

1. It works better.
2. It works longer.

It works better.

When I was at E. & J. Gallo Winery, each month we held a general sales meeting with 250 people (the whole distributor in Southern California gathered to set clear direction for the coming month). Then each week, we would have 30 plus team meetings followed by one-to-one meetings with each person's direct manager to ensure execution was in play. I learned the power of the three R's: rhythm, routine, and ritual. Each week, "come hell or high water," we would meet. I worked for Gallo as a sales rep, then district manager, and finally regional manager. They had amazing protocols, discipline, and consistency. I learned the gold standard of leading people well in order to get great results.

Every company I worked for after that did it wrong or only got parts of the process right. I could not believe they did not use the gold standard. On top of that, every company got upset that execution was not better. I made it known that I had been trying to tell them the importance of getting clear, communicating it to the groups annually, quarterly, and monthly, and then following up with weekly meetings to ensure accountability and encouragement happen with weekly one-to-one meetings. But despite the results that they demanded, leadership saw this follow-up process as being too much. And sure, while it can feel that way, it is proven to lead to great execution. Without one-to-one meetings, you simply hope everyone is clear and doing the right things week by week.

"It's better to know than to guess."

In my professional opinion, this is the best system hands down to attain fast results, but does it work better over time?

One-to-one meetings work longer.

"Better to have a guide by your side than a sage on the stage."

I'm always surprised that I need to prove this point, that taking time to focus on one person works better than simply having a team meeting, an email blast or a talk from the stage. What works better in marriage: a group date with ten couples or regular one-to-one dates? Without the one-to-one time, how healthy will that marriage be? Think of school or learning. Is a group lecture the best approach (only one-way communication), or is a one-to-one two-way conversation with the lecturer where you can ask questions and get individualized learning better?

As the Navy Seals say, “slow is smooth, smooth is fast.” One-to-one meetings feel slow, but in the long run they are like doubling a penny every day for a year versus me giving you a \$1,000,000 dollar lump sum. The penny a day doubled for a month equals \$5,369,000. See how starting small and slow is better than a fast million!

The point here is the more personalized the conversation, the more information and objectives stick. If people get a chance to weigh in, they are more likely buy in. When I make a commitment to an outcome, I’m way more invested than if I’m simply told what my commitment is. It’s called psychological ownership. The ROI on this type of personalized decision making is easily 50% better. So, why would managers, leaders, family members, husbands, wives, significant others and parents not make more time for one-to-one interactions? There are three primary reasons.

Time.

We have concluded that one-to-one exchanges take too much time and aren’t worth the minutes they require. The time spent does not equal the perceived benefit. We say to ourselves, I don’t think one-to-one meetings are impactful. Team meetings can kill more birds with one stone, so to speak. Company-wide meetings get the message out to as many people as possible. Individual meetings seem to require too many resources and hours in a day, week, or month to make them worthwhile. That is, until you actually do them consistently.

Fear.

Getting one-to-one with an employee can also pave the way for loss of control. Some leaders feel trapped. A big gathering or an email blast where there is no feedback or safe feedback is way simpler than fielding potential questions, challenges, and concerns.

Tools.

We lack the tools needed to guide us. Leaders simply don’t understand how to get started or what makes for productive one-to-one interactions with their staff. Thus the reason I’m writing all this is to help you overcome these restraints and propel you toward greater results. I believe the one-to-one meeting is a superpower. (For more resources, go to www.leadershipbydesign.com/resources)

Let me state one more quality of one-to-one meetings, or, as I also like to call it, the coach approach to leadership. This perspective is the most respectful to you and the other person. Why? Because you can customize and tailor fit the conversation for maximum impact.

I’ve heard some people say this entitles others. I think that’s totally absurd. Meeting one-on-one is not about doing whatever the individual wants or catering to demands. Instead, we are taking the time to find out what truly matters to our team members, what motivates them, and what hopes and dreams they have.

This whole premis assumes we have the right team members. If not, that’s a whole other issue. Top-notch character matters here. So, assuming you have the right staff, are we taking the time to build them up? Coach them? Develop them? Honor them? And really help them be the best versions of themselves? Then when executed correctly, this mindset and methodology floats down river to all the other team members. It makes everyone better and that waterfalls further out to vendors and customers. When all that is working well then key stakeholders are happy. Win-win-win.

How many people want a deeper dive? More context about this style of leadership? If you do, keep reading. If you want practical next steps skip to page 4 (6 tips for great one-on-one conversations).

Would it surprise you if I told you this one-to-one or coach approach leadership style is not new? If we go back to 400 BC, there was a guy named Socrates who did leadership just like this. He started what is now called Socratic leadership. He influenced Plato, who influenced Aristotle and dozens of other leaders that you probably know the names of; they all have these busts made and their images in stone. They were in a highly educated society just like we are. Maybe there is a connection there. Let me read you the Socratic approach to leadership: "It's a form of inquiry between individuals, based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and illuminate ideas." Check that out! Do we need better thinkers today? Yes! Do we need more creative innovators today? Yes! Is coaching a way to do that? Yes! Let's talk more about that.

Let me tell you a story about a guy named Greg Brown. Greg hired me at E & J Gallo Winery. They were like working for Google today. Gallo taught us more of a coach approach but in practically every other way modeled hammer, hammer, hammer, push, push, push. I picked up on the fact that that's the way you do things in the business world. So, that's how I did it for three months and it wasn't working. I was ready to quit. Greg Brown, a Harvard MBA, was a sharp guy who was a couple of years older than me, and I really respected him. Before I quit the job, I thought I would go have lunch with him. We met up, talked sports, and he finally asked me what he could do to help me. I asked him 3 or 4 questions, and he basically responded to every question "Andy, what do you think?"

For example, "Greg, how do I get to the next level at E & J Gallo?" "Well, Andy, that's a great question!" He was honoring me there. "Andy, you're a smart guy" MORE HONOR! I am a smart guy, I thought about how I took my rugby team in college from worst to first. I started my own company in college; I found a way to improve my grades in college when I was a student on academic probation. I even graduated. This guy gets me!

"Andy, how would you answer that question?" Wow! Okay, now I have to think. He's saying, hey Andy if it was your winery and you owned it, how would you do that? I have to tell you that I left that lunch fired up! I was thinking globally and acting locally. I went back to San Diego ready to make an impact. I can't tell you exactly what changed, but I took ownership. Someone finally treated me with respect, finally gave me a challenge big enough for who I was. I worked hard and got promoted to the number one demographic market in Southern California. Then I became district manager, and further got promoted to regional manager in Chicago. I achieved all of that because someone honored me enough to meet one-to-one, and strangely not answer my questions; he gave me the confidence to think for myself. How powerful could that be for you and the people on your team? It can be done in a 500-person gathering as well as the ten-person team meeting?

The coaching conversation or one-to-one meeting is the simplest concept, but the simplicity is the part most of us miss. If you're not paying attention, it's going to fly right by you. This is the killer application (killer app) **asking and listening**, not asking and telling!

Like oxygen and H₂O, asking and listening go hand in hand. I don't know about you, but this is really difficult for me to do, so I'm going to give you some tools and hacks. A guy named Zig Ziglar said, "You can get everything in life you want, by helping enough other people get what they want." Why would I want to do the coach approach? Why can't I just tell everyone what to do? Well, that's kind of the point. Here's the quote again; "If you want to get everything you want, help enough other people get what they want." You help them get what they want; they are going to help you get what you want. I was only as good as my team. I couldn't shoot the gun anymore, I couldn't sell the product anymore, I was only as good as them. I had to develop them to do these things.

And it's not the golden rule you need to master but the platinum rule.

Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have done unto you.

Platinum Rule: Do unto others as they would have done unto them.

One of my business partners had the “I have to always be prepared” syndrome. To get ready for her one-to-one coach approach meetings, she had to prepare. It really stressed her out, and she was obsessed over them. I said, hey, don’t prepare at all; simply show up with a desire to listen, learn, and be curious. The rest will come to you. Trust your intuition; we’re built for it. You will know how to ask the right questions at the right time and have the supernatural ability to refrain from giving answers and advice. Remember to put the answer back to the other person, or ask them what they think the best course of action is. Fight the need to prove you’re the expert.

But in this super distracted world we live in, does it help?

This is a new saying: if you have not said something seven times you’ve not even said it once. So, have seven team meetings with one point or seven one-to-one meetings. Which would add more long-term value?

Here are six tips to have great one-to-one conversations.

1. **Define the goal.** Always start with what the other person would like to accomplish today. Set the objective. Don’t come in telling the other person what to do. Honor them by asking.
2. **Listen 2 to 1.** How many ears do you have? Two. How many mouths do you have? Just one. If you can’t do the math, it’s 66% of the conversation you need to be doing what? Listening! Very sobering, isn’t it? I want to challenge you today, tomorrow, the rest of this week, and this weekend: Start monitoring your meetings or your conversations and see how much you really do listen, and use that 66% mark as your benchmark.

Larry King was a great interviewer and talk show host. He said, “I’ve never learned anything with my mouth open.” As leaders, we need to be the best learners in the organization, especially in this creative, knowledge worker post-information era. That’s even more critical. That will set you apart because stuff is changing so fast. We’ve got to be lifetime learners.

Here’s a great tool. You’ve heard of the KISS principle, keep it simple stupid. Here’s the WAIT principle. This is one of my favorites! W.A.I.T: Why Am I Talking? I know why I’m talking today, but in a lot of meetings I hold that acronym up so I can see it or think to myself, “Yeah, why am I talking?” I just keep rambling on. I guess I like to hear myself talk. So wait. I want to remind you and encourage you, listening is a muscle. Start out with five pounds and work up to forty. I always tell people to go into some meetings and say, “hey, I was on this webinar the other day and I really got encouraged to be a better listener, and I realized I’m not the best listener.” By the way, they already know. This won’t be a surprise to them, trust me. It will be so refreshing. Say to them “I’m probably not going to be really good at this, but I want to give you my best five minutes.” Work your way up. It’s a muscle. Again, at this point, if you are like, “Andy, you are killing me! I can’t do that!” What was my suggestion? Delegate it. Find someone else who can do it. That doesn’t let you off the hook, still, work that muscle, but if it’s not something you can do often that’s okay.

3. **Ask a powerful question.** You’ve got to find your favorites because if you ask something that you want to know the answer to, you’re going to be tuned in and listen better. I like to ask, “Hey, what would you do if you had ten million dollars in the bank?” I asked one guy this question once, and he just looked at me, and I went “okay, sorry 25 million.” My guess is that he already had ten million. It’s amazing what you’ll hear but you have to mean it. I also like to ask,

"Where did you grow up?" I'm really interested in geography, and I love traveling. I've been to a lot of places and I love to hear where people grew up. The chances are that I've been there or I know something about that town, and it creates some commonality and builds the relationship. Come up with your own questions. If you want some examples, you can google, powerful questions.

4. **Use A.S.K.** This is another acronym. All you do is ask a powerful question. "A" ask, "S" is shut up and listen. "K" keep asking questions as Greg Brown did with me in Southern California twenty years ago. Let me tell you a quick story. I have a CEO client who runs four banks, and early in our relationship he called me up and said, "Hey, I have a big question for you, I need to fire someone and I just want to know the right way to do it." I went "Wait a minute, when are you doing this?" "Thirty minutes" "You're kidding! Okay, we don't have time. Would you do me a favor? I don't know the circumstances but can we take a risk" He said, "Okay." I said, I want you to go into that meeting and pull that laminated card out that I gave you the other day, the one that says ASK. And I want you to take a third party into the meeting with you just to have that other person sit there just so there are three people. And I want you to ASK the person that you want to fire. Mind you this was an important person in the company, but she just wasn't working out. Put her name in there and say, "Hey (blank), how do you feel like this job is going? Tell me what you think about this job?" Always put feel and think in a powerful questions because all of us are either thinkers or feelers. I didn't know who she was or anything about her, so I told him to put both of them in there, and he did. He called me back after the meeting and said, "You won't believe it, we had the best meeting! She's fired up. We're fired up. She had all of the same concerns we did. We got a game plan, she didn't have a game plan, and we never gave her a game plan, and here we go!!" WOW. It's been two years since that meeting; she brings in over half of all new business for that chain of banks and is now a very, very, strategic person in the company.

5. **Focus on a person's strengths, not their weaknesses, when you are meeting with them.** In other words, use tools. Bring some science into it. Finding tools that you really like or use a questionnaire. The easiest tool is available on Amazon, and it's called " Strengths Finder 2.0." Use tools like this to create conversational jump off points. Again, you don't have to have the answers. I'll give you a quick story. In the best coaching meeting that I ever had, I maybe said ten words. I thought it was the worst one I ever had. We got on the phone, 30-minute call, said "Hey, tell me how you're doing. Give me an update." They were focused, went right through the items that I would have thought they would have needed to go through, and talked about a couple wins and ideas. Halfway through I asked him to talk to me more about that because I knew that was important to them. With five minutes left, I said, "What do we need to do before we wrap up?" and he totally redirected to a new topic. I thought that was the worst call I had ever had and that I hadn't added any value. At the end of each call I always ask my clients what was meaningful to them from our conversation to gauge whether they got value or not. The guy says to me, "This was the best coaching call we've ever had, I don't know what was different but can we have more of these?" With a tool like this you can just tee up the meeting and say, "Hey, tell me what you thought about that tool." or "what's top of mind for you today?"

6. **The coaching conversation.** This is the most important one that you can walk away with if you don't remember anything else. You can just do this, anytime. I'm going to give you three steps.

We've already covered two of them in the ASK card, asking a powerful question and active listening. And at some point, you have to land the airplane. In my opinion, they can land it, you have to do that otherwise what in the world are we having a conversation about anyway. Ask, listen, and then use a landing option. Here's one example: "Hey, we've been meeting here for forty minutes at this Starbucks. Before we wrap up, what do you see your next step being?" I'm giving you the permission to ask that, and they're going to answer it. Hopefully, they'll be tougher on themselves than you would be. Here is another option; "Hey, how can I help?" and then listen. The final option: "So, when will you report your results back to me?" Now that feels more like what you are used to right? I mean you are running a company or you have a business, deadlines, and budgets. I recognize that. You need to land the airplane at some point, but you've built the relationship in the process. It's a win-win. They take psychic or mental ownership of that result. They have emotional buy-in.

"Oh, Andy, you're killing me again! I've been to this university: I've got a master's degree." So did Greg Brown twenty years ago and look how it influenced me. I'm not saying you have to suspend your education, but give it a chance. You're still going to have your business meeting too where you can get up there and you can be the expert, but give them the chance to have this type of one-on-one meeting too.

In terms of the coach approach, there's a quote I want to share: "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always gotten." True right? I rather like the more positive version of that one, it just speaks to me a little bit differently and it goes like this, "If you want to get what you've never gotten, you'll have to do what you've never done." This might be one of those things. I'm going to give you a Napoleon Hill quote that I just heard, "You will find happiness only when you help others find happiness." How about World War II? If you've watched the HBO special *Band of Brothers*, you'll recall Major Sobel. Episode one was about the first ever paratroopers, and he led them with an iron fist. Now there was some good to that since he made some tough soldiers, but who is the real winner? Major Winters who throughout the balance of the movie led with a balanced approach of command and control and the coach approach. "You will find happiness, only when you help others find happiness." Think about the other people on your team and what they need.

In closing, remember , if you don't use it, you're going to lose it. With this coach approach, engage it immediately in your next conversation then you be the judge of its benefits.

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