



Yes, I am aware that situationalizing is not a real word.

I'm trying to stick with the -ing theme, and I couldn't find another word that captures so nicely what this fake word is trying to convey.

And look, Dr. Seuss made up words. Shakespeare made up words. I'm not putting myself in their category. I'm not not putting myself there but language is living, so let's stick with personalizing and situationalizing.

These are two really important concepts that are going to add value to the one-on-ones you're having with your team.

When I use that word 'personal' I mean it in two different senses.

The first is a sense that you've already heard me talk about and you're going to continue to hear me talk about which is individualizing is catering the way you lead these one-on-ones based on the needs and preferences of your staff.

The other meaning of personal or personalizing is getting to know your staff as a person not just as an employee.

Now, of course you want to be cautious here not to fall on either end of an extreme when it comes to getting to know your staff as people.

You don't want it to set up a situation where your staff is divulging their deep, dark secrets to you where it crosses a line and starts to get a little bit uncomfortable or awkward.

You want to make sure that you're maintaining boundaries with your staff, but not so much so that you end up on the other end of the extreme where you're so concerned about those boundaries that you never ask your staff anything about who they are as people and the relationship is a little bit robotic.

They might feel like another cog in that proverbial wheel.

You want to find that sweet spot, and of course where your staff falls on that spectrum will be unique to that staff.

It's a learning process.

You want to err on the side of caution in the beginning as you get to know them but it's important that you know who they are as people and let them take the lead.

What do they like to talk about?

If it's a hobby, things they watch, read, cook, eat, if they want to talk about their family, their vacation, what they do on the weekends- let them take the lead.



Start to take an interest in things that they care about outside of work.

You want to open up the meeting with a little bit of space to check in with how they're doing on work stuff.

A simple opening to a meeting like *how's it going?*

*How's your day?*

*How's your week?*

*What's something great that happened today?*

*What's something terrible that happened today?*

*What's a highlight of the day?*

You can shake it up a little bit but you don't just want to dive into your agenda because for most people- not all but for most people- they're going to want a little bit of a warm-up into what the agenda of the day is.

This part of the meeting is really valuable because it helps to build your relationship with your staff.

Now again, you want to follow your staff's lead. The first time that I was supervising a team. It was technically the smallest team possible. It was two people and I was just figuring out this whole supervising thing. As soon as something worked for one person, I'd go ahead and implement it for the other and of course they were two totally different people. So almost always what I would implement with one person didn't end up working with the other.

When it came to supervision for our one-on-one time, I tended to dive right into the agenda, and one of the staff would sort of interrupt me a little bit- always respectfully- and ask me how my weekend was or how my mother was doing.

It became very clear that they were telling me, *Hey, let's talk a little bit before we dive into this.*

So I adjusted accordingly. Then I took that same approach with my second staff and started asking all kinds of questions and the second staff was like, *what are we talking about? Let's hit this agenda.*

So you want to find the balance that works for everybody. Every staff member is going to be different. Your one staff is not going to be the same as your other staff. Just as no two staff are alike, no two one-on-ones are alike.



Yes, you're going to have some type of baseline rhythm when work is quote unquote normal, but for a lot of folks, there really isn't a normal when it comes to work.

Especially if you're in the nonprofit sector or you are in a place where things just seem to change every day.

Every one-on-one that you're approaching, don't go into autopilot because there's always going to be something that's a little bit different.

It might be the circumstances. It might be something going on with you. It might be something going on with your staff. It might be all three.

This is where the situationalizing- I'm gonna make it happen- comes into play.

Where you're able to adjust to what's going on around you to make that one-on-one as valuable as possible.

Now as you're getting to know your staff and you're working intentionally toward making your one-on-ones valuable.

There are a few approaches to take.

The first one is simply asking your staff what they like, what they like to talk about, how they like to format the meaning. Whatever pieces of those meanings are already in place, talk to your staff and ask them for their feedback.

Does it work for them?

Does it not work for them?

Are you spending too much time in one area or not enough time in another?

Are you talking too much about one thing but not another?

Is it too much feedback?

Not enough?

Ask them directly. They're going to know best what's working for them. But we're only ever so self-aware. Sometimes they might be giving you what they think is an honest answer but their actions are telling you something different.

In addition to asking, observe their behavior. They might be telling you they're really happy with something but the way that they're showing up or their body language is telling a different story.

Observe.



When you build that relationship, you can start to broach that discrepancy.

*I remember you told me that you really love to talk about your weekend, but when we talked about your weekend, I noticed you shut down a little bit. What's going on there?*

No judgment. Just curiosity.

Start to call out where some things might have a discrepancy.

You can figure out the best way to approach it. Then you adjust accordingly. You want to check in later to see how things are going. Don't check in ad nauseam. You don't every single meeting want to sit and say, *so, how did the meeting go? What worked? What didn't work?*

You don't want to do it all the time. Quarterly is a nice roundabout time- every four months or so to check in and say, *how are the one one-on-ones going? Is there something you want to adjust?*

You want to be both focused and flexible. This is one of the many areas of balance as a supervisor. You want to get through what you need to get through on that agenda, and you also want to be flexible to things that come up because of course things come up.

Figure out when you need to be a little bit more one than the other. It is always a judgment call. You won't always get it right. Work with your staff to try to find that balance as best you can.

When you need to go off agenda or when you really can't go off agenda, These are some phrases you can think about using.

One, when you're setting up the meeting and you're going over the agenda, you can say, *is there anything else you want to make sure we talk about today?*

Something might have come up from the time you sent the agenda to when the meeting actually happens. Always check in about that.

If your staff brings up something that just is so irrelevant to what you're focusing on or it's not pressing at all, you can say something like, *I'm afraid we won't have time to get to that today. Let's set up another time to meet or we'll talk about it in the next session when we have more time.*

If something comes up on your end, that's really pertinent, let them know something came up. *We need to get to it today. I know the other things on our agenda are important. I promise you we will get to them'* and then set a time to make sure you get to them.

If you have a staff who if they had their druthers, would spend the entire meeting



venting, find a way to manage this. You can always do it with humor. Always with respect. You can say something like, *let's spend another couple minutes on this before moving on.*

Of course, if it's something serious you want to give it as much time as is needed. As you get to know your staff, you'll get a sense of who will vent forever if given the opportunity.

If there's not really something that jumps out to you that absolutely takes precedence, involve your team.

*This is my priority or I think this is what might be our priority. What do you think? What do you want to make sure we focus on most today?*

Be flexible on time if people need a little extra time, but again, be careful. You don't want to end up with our meetings going into 2 or 3 hours because you're being so flexible with the time.

Be flexible on personality. People who maybe are more chatty or less chatty. Some people will say they're uncomfortable giving you feedback.

You want to respect what they're telling you but also continue to stress what is important and help them get out of that comfort zone when it's necessary and valuable.

It's always a work in progress. Keep at it. Keep the conversation going.

Just like language is living so are one-on-ones.

Make sure you and your staff are working together to always make them as valuable as possible.