

# Are Employees' Needs Being Met by One-on-Ones?

## Survey Says “NO”

By Drea Zigarmi, Jim Diehl, Dobie Houson, and David Witt

Employees want more meetings with their boss. That's one of the key findings from a survey conducted by *Training* magazine and The Ken Blanchard Companies®. More than 700 subscribers of *Training* magazine were polled to learn about their experiences having one-on-one meetings with their managers. Readers were asked what they wanted out of their meetings and how that compared to what was really happening. This research gives an important new look into what is being discussed and how it is meeting the needs of today's workers.

### How often do people want to meet with their manager?

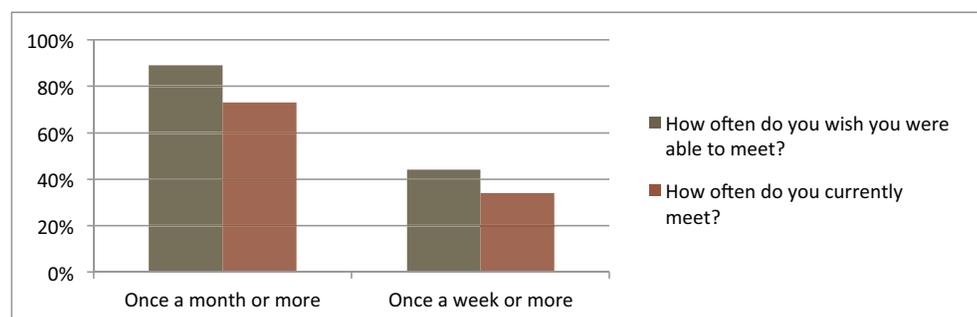
One of the first questions respondents were asked was how often they currently meet with their direct manager versus how often they wished they were meeting with him or her.

Participants could choose answers ranging from “Rarely or Never” on the low side to “More than once a week” on the high side. A summary of the 700-plus people who responded appears below. The two columns on the left represent combined answers from respondents who chose once a month, twice a month, once a week, or more than once a week responses. The two columns on the right are a subset of the larger group representing people who chose once a week or once a week or more as their responses.

### Key Takeaways

- 89% of people want to meet with their manager on at least a monthly basis, with 44% of the people polled wanting to meet at least once per week.
- Only 73% of people actually do meet at least once a month. Only 34% of people actually meet at least once per week.
- Gender Differences—A closer look at responses by gender identified that one sex prefers to meet more often. Which gender prefers more frequent check-ins to talk? *Men!*

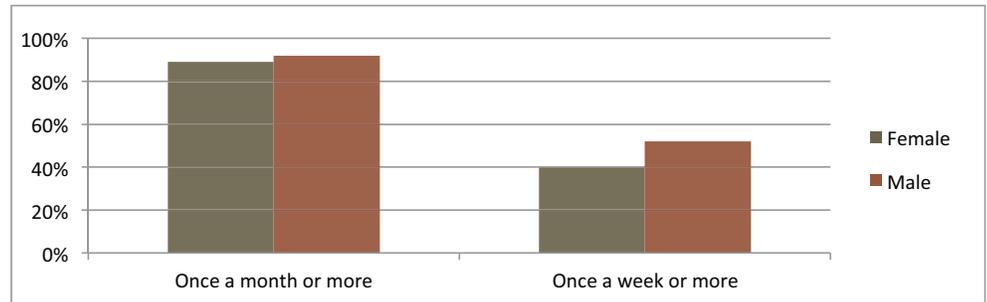
Figure 1: How often do you meet?—desired versus actual



### Key Takeaways

- 89% of women want to meet at least monthly, 40% want to meet at least weekly.
- 92% of men want to meet at least monthly, 52% want to meet at least weekly.

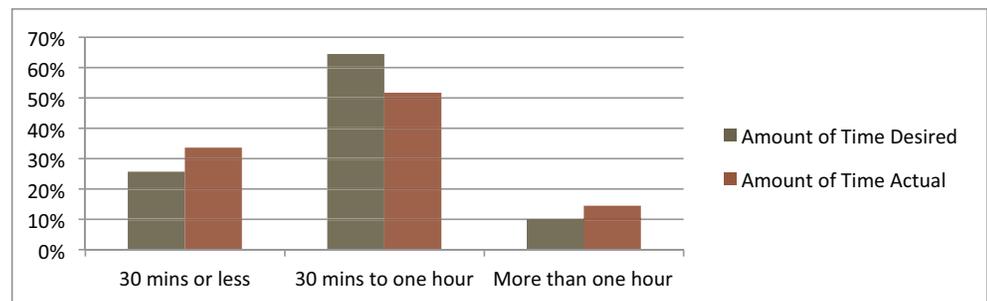
Figure 2: Men versus women—desired frequency to meet



### One-on-One Timing and Responsibility for Agenda

The survey also looked at some of the details regarding length of time for the meeting and who respondents felt should be responsible for setting the agenda. Participants could choose from among three different time frames—30 minutes or less, 30 minutes to one hour, or more than one hour. The results showed that the majority of people desired and currently met in the 30- to 60-minute midrange.

Figure 3: Length of meeting—desired versus actual



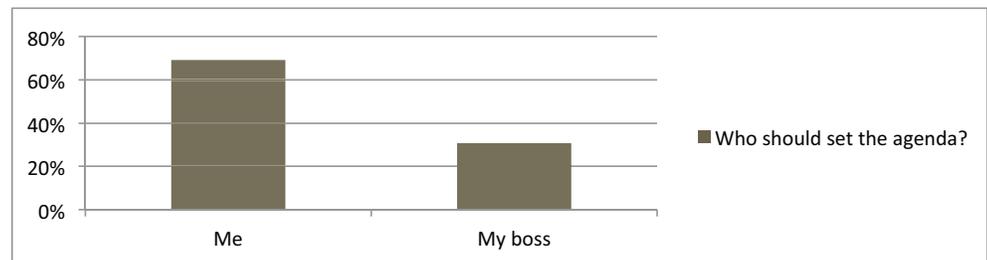
### Key Takeaways

- 65% of people want to meet for 30 minutes to 60 minutes when they get together with their manager.

### Responsibility for Setting the Agenda

When it came to setting the agenda for one-on-one meetings, the overwhelming majority of people wanted to take on the responsibility themselves.

Figure 4: Who should have responsibility for setting one-on-one agenda?



### Key Takeaways

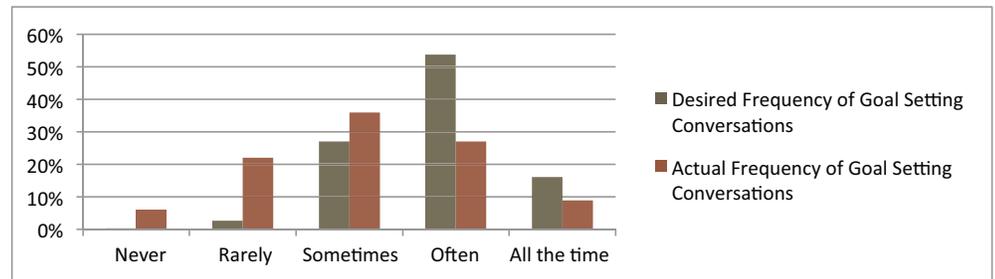
- 69% of people believe that they should set the agenda.

## Desired Topics versus Actual Topics Discussed during One-on-One Meetings

Next the survey looked at what people want to talk about during their one-on-ones versus what they actually do talk about.

Several common topics usually discussed by managers and direct reports were identified: Goal Setting, Goal Review, Performance Feedback, Problem Solving, Soliciting Support, Problems with Colleagues, and Personal Issues. Respondents were asked to identify how often they would like to discuss these types of issues during their time with their manager and also report out on how much time they actually spent on these types of issues. Figures 5 through 11 show the results and key takeaways for each separate topic.

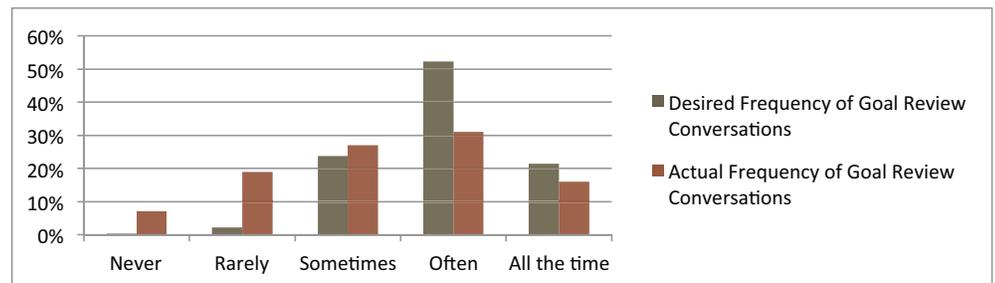
Figure 5: Goal Setting Conversations—desired versus actual



### Key Takeaways

- 70% of people want to have Goal Setting conversations Often or All the Time, but only 36% actually do. (28% say they Rarely or Never discuss future goals and tasks.)

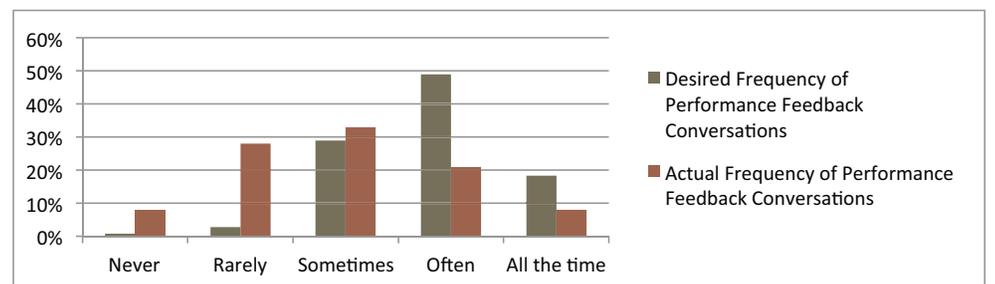
Figure 6: Goal Review Conversations—desired versus actual



### Key Takeaways

- 73% of people want to have Goal Review conversations Often or All the Time, but only 47% actually do. (26% say they Rarely or Never discuss current goals and tasks.)

Figure 7: Performance Feedback Conversations—desired versus actual



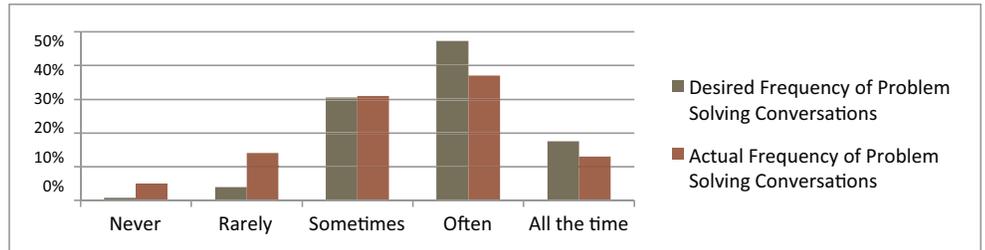
### Key Takeaways

- 67% of people want to have Performance Feedback conversations Often or All the Time, but only 29% actually do. (36% say they Rarely or Never receive Performance Feedback.)

### Key Takeaways

- 64% want to discuss Problem Solving Often or All the Time, while 50% actually do. (19% say they Rarely or Never do.)

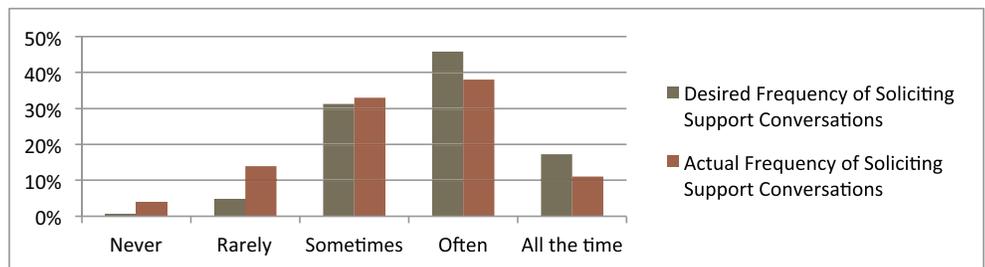
Figure 8: Problem Solving Conversations—desired versus actual



### Key Takeaways

- 63% would like to Solicit Support Often or All the Time from their boss on projects, but only 49% experience it. (18% say they Rarely or Never have Soliciting Support conversations.)

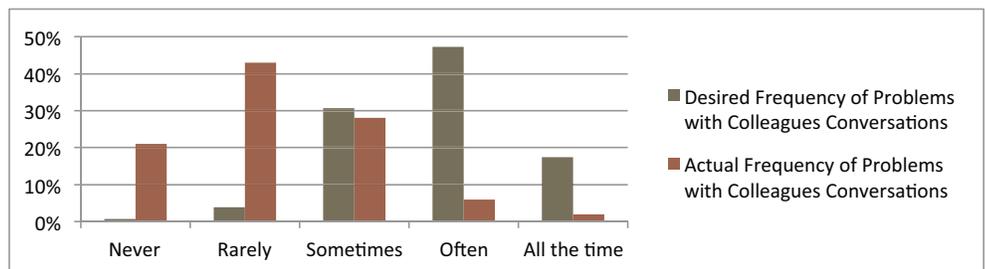
Figure 9: Soliciting Support Conversations—desired versus actual



### Key Takeaways

- 64% wish they could talk about Problems with Colleagues on an Often or All the Time basis, but only 8% actually do.

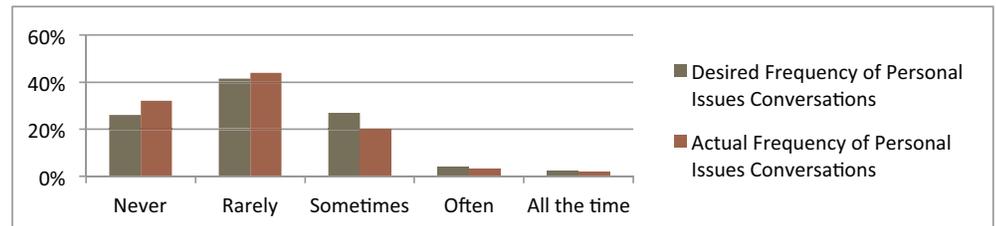
Figure 10: Problems with Colleagues Conversations—desired versus actual



## Key Takeaways

- This is the one area where desired frequency and actual frequency match up for respondents. Only 5% of people want to discuss Personal Issues on an Often or All the Time basis and only 5% actually do. (68% don't desire to discuss personal issues and 76% don't discuss them.)

Figure 11: Personal Issues Conversations—desired versus actual



## Additional Topics

In addition to the seven topics respondents could choose from in the survey, an open text option was available for participants to identify additional subjects they have discussed during one-on-ones with their supervisor. More than 30% of the respondents added additional items. Summarizing the individual responses into larger themes identified four additional concepts worth noting.

1. **Strategy:** More than 50 different respondents identified brainstorming business opportunities, ideas to improve processes and tasks, plans for upcoming projects, and strategic planning to meet business goals as topics they have discussed with their manager.
2. **Updates:** A similar number of respondents identified general information updates as topics covered. Information sharing included latest performance indicators and updates on corporate strategy, objectives, culture, and leadership priorities.
3. **Issues:** Day-to-day operational issues, including those related to organization structure and business processes were mentioned third most often. Personnel, management styles, and communication gaps were all discussed. Budgeting, resources, and permission to proceed with tasks that require executive approval were also identified.
4. **Boss' agenda:** In the fourth most mentioned theme, respondents identified that they often found themselves discussing the needs of their boss instead of their own—for example, the boss' personal concerns, issues, and relationships in the organization.

## **Impact and implications for leaders**

One-on-ones are an important way that leaders demonstrate that they care about employees. Spending time is a clear indication that an employee's work is important and that he or she is a valued member of the team. It's also a way for managers to make themselves available to help direct reports as needed.

In this survey, 89% of respondents identified that they would prefer to meet with their direct supervisor on at least a monthly basis, and 44% of the people polled indicated that they wanted to meet at least once per week.

A 10- to 16-point gap currently exists, according to the survey data, with only 73% of people actually meeting at least once a month and only 34% of people actually meeting at least once per week.

## **Managers need to make more time for their people**

On six of seven specific issues related to performance management—Goal Setting, Goal Review, Performance Feedback, Problem Solving, Soliciting Support, and Problems with Colleagues—at least 63% of respondents say that they want to discuss these issues on an Often or All the Time basis, but only 47% to 50% of them get that chance.

For two of the most important performance management areas, Goal Setting and Performance Feedback, the actual number of people saying they talk Often or All the Time in these two areas is only 36% and 29% respectively. Even more concerning, 28% say they Rarely or Never have Goal Setting conversations with their manager, and 36% say they Rarely or Never have Performance Feedback conversations.

## **Make time today**

Where you spend your time is a clear indication of what you value. Performance management literature is clear on the importance of setting goals, providing day-to-day coaching, and reviewing performance on a frequent basis.

Using this survey data as a starting point, organizations can begin to evaluate and encourage their managers to spend more time with their people. Most people want and need to have conversations with their immediate supervisors. It's one of the foundations for strong, productive relationships that align people with the work of the organization in a satisfying and meaningful way. Smart organizations will get started today!

### **About the authors**

Dr. Drea Zigarmi is coauthor of *Achieve Leadership Genius* (2007) and *The Leader Within* (2005), and is a founding associate of The Ken Blanchard Companies®.

Jim Diehl, Dobie Houson, and David Witt are contributing authors and practice leaders of The Ken Blanchard Companies' research into the factors that create a passionate and engaging work environment.

## About The Ken Blanchard Companies\*

With more than three decades of helping leaders and organizations, more than 18 million books in print, programs offered in more than 12 languages, and clients across six continents, The Ken Blanchard Companies is recognized as one of the world's leading training and development experts. Our groundbreaking thinking and memorable learner experiences create lasting behavioral change that has measurable impact on the organizations with which we work—companies that wish to develop leadership capacity, improve workplace cultures, drive organizational change and strategic alignment, and become high performing organizations. Using a collaborative diagnostic process, we help identify each organization's unique needs and business issues, and then help to develop an appropriate leadership strategy to drive results and profits.

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