

1:1 Coaching Cheat Sheet

Purpose

*Draw out insight, surface what's unspoken,
and stay curious, even when the answer is uncomfortable.
Avoid fixing, defending, or performing.
Treat the conversation as an opportunity
to learn something you did not know.*

What to Look and Listen For

- Rehearsed or overly polished statements (“We’re all aligned on that” when tension exists)
- Gaps between stated values and observed behavior (“I value transparency” but avoids giving hard feedback)
- Assigning reasons for one’s actions to others (“I don’t have that conversation because I don’t want to make them uncomfortable”)
- Hesitation, vague language, or sudden topic changes
- Emotional shifts: tone, pace, posture, or energy changes
- Repeated themes, patterns, or metaphors (“We’re fighting fires” / “Feels like a hamster wheel”)
- Contradictions between current and past statements
- Overgeneralizations (“Everybody feels that way” / “It’s always like this”)
- Downplaying or brushing past significant points
- Focus on circumstances instead of ownership (“There’s nothing I can do until corporate decides”)
- Indirect references to unspoken issues (“Let’s just say it’s complicated”)
- Signs they are shielding you from something (“You don’t need to worry about that”)

What to Do in Real Time

- Maintain open body language and steady, relaxed eye contact
- Ask one clear question at a time — pause after asking
- Follow the thread — probe deeper if something feels loaded or incomplete
- Use silence to encourage depth without pressure
- Reflect back exactly what you heard before moving on
- Ask about patterns, not just incidents
- Name inconsistencies without judgment (“Earlier you said X, now you’re saying Y — help me understand that”)
- Name avoidance when you sense it (“It sounds like this might be hard to talk about — what’s making it difficult?”)
- Keep tone steady, even when content is surprising or critical
- Be fully present — no devices, no multitasking

What to Avoid

- Over-talking or dominating the conversation
- Offering advice disguised as a question (“Have you thought about doing X?”)
- Filling silence with your own stories or examples
- Steering toward your own agenda instead of following theirs
- Asking only safe, surface-level questions
- Diluting a direct question to protect yourself or them
- Jumping to conclusions before they finish speaking
- Interrupting to correct or debate
- Trying to “win” the conversation or prove your insight
- Using humor or sarcasm to sidestep discomfort

Mindset to Keep

- Curiosity over certainty
- Openness over control
- Discovery over performance
- Willingness to hear what you would rather not hear
- Treat every answer as a doorway to the next question
- Their answer is information — not a verdict on you

After the Conversation

- Note the most surprising thing you heard
- Note the most uncomfortable thing you heard — and why
- Identify what you left unasked — and why you avoided it
- Ask yourself: How does what I learned here prepare me for October’s feedback session?

