

The skip-level meeting, in thirty minutes

An agenda you can run from, a question bank to pick from, and the three things to write down before you leave. Bring it to the meeting and write on it.

The agenda

30 MINUTES

- 0-5 min** **Open.** Say plainly why you are there: not an evaluation, just a chance to hear how things look from where they sit. Set the confidentiality line.
- "Nothing you say gets repeated back to [manager] with your name on it, but if something needs fixing, I'll fix it."*
- 5-20 min** **Questions.** Pick three or four from the bank overleaf, across categories rather than one from each. Do not run the whole list. A meeting that works through a checklist stops being a conversation and starts being an interview.
- 20-25 min** **One open question.** Ask it, then leave real silence after it. Most people need a few seconds before they answer this one honestly.
- "Is there anything worth me knowing that hasn't reached me yet?"*
- 25-30 min** **Close.** Tell them what happens next, even loosely, and roughly when you will follow up. If a skip-level produces no visible next step, the next one gets shorter answers.
- "I'll look into the on-call thing, and I'll come back to you before the end of the month."*

If you only have fifteen minutes

SAME SHAPE, LESS ROOM

0-2 min · Open

The same line, shorter: why you are there, and what happens with what they say.

2-11 min · Two questions

One from **the work**, one from **the person**. Those two are least visible to you from status reports.

11-13 min · Open door

"Anything worth me knowing that hasn't reached me?" The same question, with less room around it.

13-15 min · Close

Even a fifteen-minute skip-level needs a visible next step, or it reads as a box someone ticked.

Opening lines that work

- "I want to hear how things look from where you sit — not an evaluation, just a read on things."
- "Nothing you say gets repeated back to [manager] with your name on it, but if something needs fixing, I'll fix it."
- "This isn't a status meeting — I've got your manager's updates already."

The question bank

TICK THREE OR FOUR

The team

- ☐ What's something the team deals with regularly that never reaches me?
- ☐ If you could fix one process tomorrow with no approval needed, what would it be?
- ☐ Who's doing work right now that isn't getting noticed?

Their manager — lead positive

- ☐ What does [manager] do that makes your work easier?
- ☐ Is there anything worth [manager] knowing that hasn't reached them yet?
- ☐ What's something [manager] handled well recently that's worth them hearing about?

The work

- ☐ What's taking longer than it reasonably should, and why?
- ☐ What would you stop doing tomorrow if you were sure nobody would notice?
- ☐ What's a recent decision that would have gone differently if someone had asked you first?

The person

- ☐ What are you proud of recently that didn't get much recognition?
- ☐ Where do you want to be in a year, and is anything here in the way of that?
- ☐ What would make this job meaningfully better, that isn't about money?

Skip any question that is really a yes or no in disguise. "Are you happy here" gets "yes" every time, while "what would make you consider leaving" gets you somewhere.

Before you leave, write down three things

1. **Any commitment you made, with an actual date.** A notebook works, as long as you reopen it before the next conversation.

2. **Anything that echoes a prior skip-level.** One mention is a data point. A second mention two months later is a pattern worth acting on.

3. **One thing to raise with their manager.** Describe it as a problem rather than attributing it to a person, so the fix does not point back to this conversation.
