



A Guide to Co-Founder Check-Ins

How to use this doc:

1. Read the intro below. For more background, read the First Round Article.
2. File -> Make a Copy to clone this doc
3. Make any edits that you see fit based on your unique partnership
4. Try it out with your co-founder during annual, quarterly and weekly check-ins!

The purpose of using this tool:

- **Stay aligned on vision & values:** As every company grows, founders' expectations, contexts and needs evolve too. It's good hygiene to identify philosophical and practical misalignments in ways that are proactive, candid and constructive.
- **Operate as a high-performing team:** A true partnership is made up of complementary roles. Typically, diversity of thought is an asset within a founding team, but it can inevitably lead to tension in decision-making. You often need an optimist and a realist, a visionary person and an operational mind, a driver and a consensus builder. These opposites are healthy as long as you appreciate one another's gifts and contributions, are candid about your weaknesses, and are willing to evolve roles and responsibilities to match each person's strengths with the company's needs.

- **Cultivate trust:** Healthy disagreement is not only inevitable, but critical to making good decisions. Having the space and skill to disagree in a productive way leads to deeper empathy and better outcomes for the business. It also results in real commitment and accountability because everyone feels heard and understood before big decisions are made. Strong partnerships are made up of two flawed leaders who are actively focused on personal growth and see one another as a mirror, teacher, complement and key asset to their leadership journey.

Establishing norms

First of all, whenever you kick off a meeting where you'd like to create a safe and courageous space to have important and challenging conversations, you need to set the tone. The meeting has to feel different than the urgent business-as-usual conversations we all have when trying to get things done without an elevated level of intention.

Setting norms for a conversation is like setting the table for a special event with candles, a table cloth, and flowers. Everyone involved has an elevated level of conscientiousness about the energy they are bringing to the conversation when you align around how you will show up.

- Suggested norms for cofounder check-ins
 - Play full out (be vulnerable, take risks, and don't hold back)
 - Assume positive intent
 - Be curious
 - Confidentiality
 - What else do you need to create a safe and courageous space?

Weekly Check-ins

- Stop-light check-in: How are you doing personally? (Red, yellow, green & why)
- How are we doing as a team?
- What can we celebrate?
- What's been unsaid that needs to be addressed?
- What do you need from me this week?

Quarterly Renewal

- If you really knew me, you'd know...
- Business
 - What's going well? What can we celebrate?

- What's off track?
- What needs to be said that's hard to say?
- Partnership
 - How well are we working together?
 - To what extent are we supporting one another's growth?
 - Where do we have misalignment to work through?
- Individual growth
 - What's giving us the most energy? What's depleting us?
 - If we could reorient our roles around our strengths, what would we do differently?
 - What's one improvement we can each make to be 10% better at what we do?

Annual Alignment

- Vision
 - What's the north star / best case scenario for our business in 5 years?
 - What's nirvana for you personally in 5 years?
 - What must be true in 1 year for our business to thrive?
 - What must be true in 1 year for you to be as engaged as possible in this work?
 - What's your high dream for our partnership? (Best case scenario)
 - What's your low dream? (Worst case scenario)
- Values
 - When were we operating at our best this year? How were we showing up?
 - When were we at our worst this year? How were we showing up?
 - Who do we have to be to achieve our vision?
 - How do we want to commit to being with one another?
- Roles & Responsibilities
 - To what extent are we operating in our strengths?
 - Which parts of our roles give us energy?
 - Which parts of our roles deplete our energy?
 - Are we each in the seat that's best for the company now? To what extent do we need to evolve our roles?
 - What support do we need to evolve into what the business needs next?
 - What talent and systems gaps do we have? How might we fill them?
- Collaboration
 - What's working well about our partnership?
 - What's not working well? (What's an inconvenient truth? What has been going unsaid that needs to be discussed?)
 - How are we making decisions together? How are we working through disagreements?
 - What's a story we're holding onto about one another? ("I have a story that...")
 - If we were one another's most valuable coach, how would we be operating differently than we are today?

- Commitments
 - What does success look like for us this next year?
 - How will we know when we've achieved it?
 - What changes do we want to make to how we work together?
 - What systems, structures, meetings, etc. might we put in place to support these changes?
 - What will we each commit to?
- Appreciations
 - What are you grateful for?