

Chapter Four – The Conversation

Successful coaches encourage, support and offer guidance. Above all, they are patient and are trustworthy listeners. They take a genuine interest in the people they are coaching and ask lots of questions that are tailored to each individual's particular situation.

Are you a great coach?

- Are you a good listener?
- Are you patient with people who know less than you?
- Do you know what each of your employees does best? What each needs to focus on?
- Are you interested in seeing other people succeed and do even better in their jobs?
- Do you make time regularly for coaching session with people you manage?
- Are you comfortable delivering praise as well as constructive suggestions/feedback?
- Are you open to feedback from your direct reports?

Managers and employees should engage in coaching and feedback conversations together. While “coachable” moments occur every day – moments that offer opportunities for praise and learning, at least two formal coaching conversations should happen during the performance year. Both parties should bring their thoughts, ideas and questions to each conversation. Together, use this time as an opportunity to listen, share and guide.

Consider using these questions during your coaching meetings:

- How can I support you?
- What progress have you made on your goals?
- What barriers prevent you from accomplishing your goals?
- What has been a recent success? How did that work? How did you do you feel about it?
- What new opportunities would you like to mention?
- What decisions do you need to make?
- What kind of feedback would be helpful right now?
- What is the most important thing you and I should talk about?
- Is there anything I've said that isn't clear? Was this helpful?

Questions for a particular situation:

- How do you think the project is going?
- Would you say more about that?
- What has worked well for you on this project? Why?
- What do you see as the goal of this project? Has the goal changed since you started?
- How will we measure the success of this project?
- What are other choices? What options do you have?
- What do you see as next steps?
- What have you learned so far?
- What are you committed to?
- When can I follow-up with you?

Questions for employees:

- Am I clear on what's expected of me?
- In what areas do I believe I'm exceeding expectations? How do I want to share this with my manager? Are there specific examples of my successes I want to share?
- In what areas do I believe I'm meeting expectations? Is there anything I need in order to do better in these areas e.g., training, resources, support, etc.
- In what areas do I believe my performance is below expectations? Why am I not meeting expectations? What do I need to improve my performance?
- Do I know the extent to which my manager is satisfied with my job performance?
- How can I share with my manager what I am working on? Project updates?
- How well am I meeting my goals? What help do I need to assure my goals are met?
- Is there information I need to share with my supervisor about barriers to my job performance, such as: workload, unclear directions, lack of skill or knowledge, etc.
- Is there training that would help me improve my performance?
- Are there additional tasks or responsibilities I would like to learn?
- What feedback do I want to give my supervisor about his/her coaching?

Sometimes a coaching and feedback conversation doesn't go exactly as planned. Below are some tips for handling employee behaviors:

If the employee becomes defensive or makes excuses:

- Listen to what the employee has to say and paraphrase back. Remain neutral. Maintain eye contact.
- Don't solve the problem.
- Ask for specifics with open-ended questions like, "Would you say more about that?"
- Try to determine the cause with phrases like, "Tell me more", "How did you reach that conclusion?"
- Ask how the employee will resolve the problem.

If the employee becomes angry or upset:

- Stay calm and centered. Maintain eye contact.
- Listen to what the employee has to say and paraphrase back.
- Let the employee "vent" for as long as they need to until they can listen to you.
- Avoid arguments.
- Bring discussion and focus back to performance and standards with statements like, "I hear you but here is what I need you to understand."
- Take a break from the situation. Agree to come back in 5 minutes, 5 hours or whatever timeframe seems most appropriate given the individual and the situation.
- Say the employee's name and ask open-ended questions.

If the employee is unresponsive or withdrawn:

- Be patient and friendly.
- Show genuine concern.
- Stay silent and wait for the employee to say something.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Encourage the employee by letting them know that you want to hear his/her input and that their input is important