

Mastering Performance Conversations

From Avoidance to Impact

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What would **close the gap**
between the score you gave
yourself and a **10**?

Would your **manager agree**
or **add** or **remove** some
thing(s)?



Challenges with Performance Reviews Only

1. **26%** of employees are **evaluated less than once a year**, while 48% are reviewed annually.
2. **71%** of employees think their **performance reviews are unfair**, and only 26% strongly agree that they are accurate.

Performance Reviews

- **Once** or **twice** a year.
- **Overall development** and career growth.
- Problems can often **languish for months** without employee notification.
- Reinforcement for good behavior is often **too late**.
- Relies on **memory**, often **fraught with errors**.

vs.

Performance Conversations

- **Weekly, bi-weekly** or **monthly**.
- **Performance development** (for career growth)
- **Identifies problems quickly**.
- **Reinforces good behavior** right away.
- Utilizes **recent events** and **performance**.
- **Reduces time** required for Performance Reviews.



How do you typically **start**
performance conversations?



Performance Conversations

Performance Conversations Evolution

World War I: Army introduces “**merit rating**” system to identify and remove poor performers

1940s: 60% of US companies used **Annual Performance Appraisals**

1970s: saw a reversion to **harsher appraisal tactics** (e.g. forced rankings under Jack Welch)

1920s: Performance Appraisals migrated into civilian workplaces, managers began assigning numerical 1-5 ratings

1960s: 90% of US companies used Annual Appraisals, then social psychologist Douglas McGregor argued that **employees thrive when trusted and empowered** and suggested managers shift from command-and-control critiques to **collaborative, coaching-oriented conversations**

Mid-2010s: a “**performance management revolution**” was underway, with pioneers like Adobe, GE, and Accenture **discarding annual reviews** in favor of **continuous feedback** and **agile goal check-ins**.





What are Performance Conversations?

1. Essential, **frequent, ongoing conversations.**
2. Allow you to **listen to your employees' perceptions** about how they are performing against business and career goals and expectations.
3. Allow you to **check your alignment** with their perception.
4. Allow you to **act as an advocate** for employees, **provide personalized coaching, make specific requests.**
5. Allow you to **deepen rapport.**



When are Performance Conversations Helpful?

1. **Regularly** to ensure employees **feel supported** and **challenged**.
2. When employees **don't know where they stand** with their manager.
3. When managers **need alignment** with employees.
4. When **changes in expectations** are necessary.
5. When employees are **dealing with added stressors**.
6. When people are **under-performing** or **exceeding expectations**.





How to Facilitate Performance Conversations

1. **Notify your employees** that you'll be discussing performance frequently.
2. **Schedule** the conversation (add to 1:1s).
3. **Prepare.**
4. Check **employee's perception of their performance** (appreciative inquiry).
5. **Check your alignment** with their perception.
6. Share where you **agree** and **disagree**. Act as their **advocate**.
7. Make **specific requests**.
8. **Follow up.**



Steps 1 & 2: Notify Employees & Schedule the Conversation



Dear Employee,

Every (week, two weeks, month) I would like to start discussing your performance during our 1:1s, so that you feel more supported and grow to reach your career and professional goals.

Please come prepared with your perception about what you're doing well, what you think you should improve and any areas of development that you would like to work on.

Please let me know if you have any questions, comments or concerns.

Warmest regards,
Your manager





Step 3: Prepare

- Note what their **job description requires** and **what you've asked them to do.**
- And **what they've delivered.**
- Note **where you would like to see improvement and development.**



Step 4: Open the Conversation

- Say, “**Now I’d like to discuss your performance. How do you think you’re performing?**”
- Be sure to **listen for what they are doing well** and **where they would like to improve or develop**.
- If they talk about status, projects or work, redirect them back to their performance by asking, “**What do you think you’re doing well and where do you think you should improve? Which skills or areas do you think you should grow and develop?**”



Steps 5 & 6: Check Your Alignment & Share Where You Agree & Disagree

- **Listen carefully** to their perception of their performance.
- **Share where you agree and disagree** with their perception.
- **Act as their advocate**, especially if they are overly critical or view their performance worse than you do.



Step 7: Make Specific Requests

- **Share where you would like to see improvement**, specifically.
- **Share any development areas** that you think would **improve their performance** and **help them reach the business goals** and their **career and professional goals**.



Step 8: Follow Up

- **Take notes.**
- **Write down any action items, areas for improvement and developmental areas.**
- **Discuss** these in your next performance conversation.

Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Avoiding Feedback:**
Embrace the conversation as part of the job. Leadership isn't all easy chats – *courageous conversations* are part of leading a high-performing team. Reframe feedback as an act of support: by addressing an issue or praising a win, you're ultimately helping the person succeed.
- **Holding Feedback for the Annual Review:**
This “**feedback hoarding**” leads to shock and defensiveness when issues surface months later.
- **Being Vague or Sugarcoating:**
Be kind, clear and direct, focusing on observable facts. Provide concrete examples (who, what, when) rather than general traits.
- **Overwhelming with Criticism:**
Piling on criticism triggers a **threat response** and shuts down learning. Select the 1–2 most impactful areas for improvement rather than drilling into every minor issue at once.
- **Assuming You Know the Cause:**
Ask for the employee's perspective: “I noticed the deadline was missed – help me understand what happened from your side.”
- **Getting Personal or Probing Inappropriately:**
Stay fact-based and professional. Focus on behaviors and then pause to allow them to explain. Keep the conversation about work behaviors and solutions, not personal character.
- **Inconsistency and Bias:**
Check your biases and be consistent. Before the conversation, ask yourself: “Would I give this same feedback if it were someone else?” and “Have I given others a pass on this?” Strive for fairness.
- **Dumping It and Disappearing:**
Follow through and coach. End the conversation by collaboratively **developing an action plan**: what steps will the employee take, and how will you help? Then **schedule follow-ups**





Conduct Performance Conversations
Weekly, Bi-Weekly or Monthly



Questions & Answers

Thank You!

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