

Five C's of a Great Coaching Conversation

This is a guide and approach to having a coaching conversation. If you remember and incorporate the **Five C's** into your coaching conversation, you are more likely to be successful:

1. Clarity

Before you have the conversation, get clear and specific on what you want to communicate. Make sure that you start with acknowledging what's working well as it creates a positive environment where the employee can be more open to listening. Get clear on the following questions. If necessary, write them out.

- ✓ What working well? What employee strengths have created that?
- ✓ What are the specific behavior changes that will serve the staff member in the future?
- ✓ What specific words will I use to describe the positive and derailing behaviors?

Specificity is really important when giving feedback and coaching someone to higher performance. And specificity is hard when we are giving feedback on "softer" behaviors like a person's self-confidence or the way they dress. Stating, "you need to have more self-confidence" is not exactly helpful as the staff member is not sure what behavior change is required. On the other hand, you can be more specific by saying "your posture and the intonation of your sentences reflected that you didn't have complete confidence in your own expertise".

2. Compassion

It's hard to give and receive feedback. We often tie ourselves up in knots because we make giving the feedback about **us** as coaches versus just a behavior change that needs to happen. Some of us are averse to conflict or we have a desire to be liked so we avoid giving feedback. To be an effective coach, we need to be clear and compassionate toward ourselves first so we get our own beliefs out of the way. Practicing self-compassion allows us to acknowledge that giving feedback is hard and helps us get ourselves out of the way.

Compassion for the person receiving the feedback is also important and helps us create an environment of caring. **How we say something is much more important than what we say.** Creating an environment of caring concern also allows us to be more direct in our feedback. Some ways to do that are:

- ✓ Start your conversation with the mindset that all feedback is a gift.
- ✓ Imagine as you give the feedback that you are talking to a close friend for whom you want nothing but the best.
- ✓ Let the employee know that you're both working toward the same goal of helping them reach their potential.
- ✓ If giving the feedback is still a bit uncomfortable for you, experiment with being vulnerable and simply stating, "I wish I was more practiced at giving feedback." This helps to create an environment of greater trust and authenticity for the conversation. The person can probably read your discomfort anyway!
- ✓ After giving the employee the feedback ask them, "What support do you need from me in order to help you reach this goal?"

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3. Curiosity

Coaching conversations are more about listening than talking. The rule we recommend you follow as the coach is 90/10. **Do 90% of the listening and 10% of the talking.** Ideally, the talking happens in the form of questions that help the staff member discover the answers within themselves. If you happen to be the staff member the 90/10 rule applies as well. Do 90% of the listening and 10% of the talking. Two people doing 90% of the listening makes for a great coaching conversation!

When we come from a place of curiosity rather than judgment or attachment to our own point of view, new insights can appear and solutions can be co-created that will help us capture stronger commitment (see below). It helps if you invite the staff member to give you their point of view first. The questions that invite curiosity are:

- ✓ “What did you do well? What strengths did you use to achieve that?”
- ✓ “What were things you could have done better? What strengths can you use to achieve that?”
- ✓ “Here’s what I observed in terms of other opportunities for development (be specific). How do these resonate for you?”
- ✓ “If you were able to master these developmental behaviors how would this help you?” (This is a great question to understand what motivates your staff member).

4. Confirmation

Coaching conversations are sometimes difficult because our own emotions are often caught up in them (both on the side of the coach and the staff member). When emotions get involved, it’s hard to really listen clearly, so seek confirmation that you are both on the same page. Pay attention to not just what is said but also what you observe in the body language. Here are some good ways to do that:

- ✓ Start by restating your understanding of what the other person said. Then seek confirmation by asking “Did I understand you correctly?”
- ✓ “I can see that you’re surprised by the feedback. Am I reading that correctly?” Acknowledging emotion is a great way to have a more authentic conversation.

5. Commitment

The end result of any great coaching conversation is a clear commitment to results and a strengthened trust in the relationship. Ways to capture commitment is to be specific in the list of agreements. Here are some good questions to ask:

- ✓ “What are the most important takeaways for you from this conversation?”
- ✓ “What are the new behaviors that you will practice?”
- ✓ “What are follow-up action items that are important, by whom and by when?”
- ✓ “What will success look like when these actions are taken?”
- ✓ “How would this success help you?”
- ✓ “What are some ways we will want to keep track of progress?”

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Go forth and coach!

We hope this has allowed you some thought starters for your next coaching conversation. We encourage you to begin using these steps to support your staff.

One last coaching question to ask if you are looking to grow in your own ability to coach is to ask your staff member, "How was this coaching conversation for you? What did we do well, what can be improved for the future?" This not only demonstrates your commitment to giving and receiving feedback, but will likely provide you with guidance and ideas for the future.