

WELCOME TO THE CONVERSATION BOX

There are three types of conversation that we should have with our team members or line manager:

1. The **check in** conversation
2. The **reward** conversation
3. The **career** conversation

And hopefully you don't have to use this one very often, but if something is going wrong:

4. The **difficult** conversation

So we have put together some cards to help these conversations flow a bit better.

No complicated forms or training modules - just human conversation starters, which can be led by the team member as much as the manager.

RULES FOR PLAY

1

Share the conversation cards with your team so they can familiarise themselves with the topics.

2

Try not to read the cards like a script or it may seem disingenuous. Start with one or two you like and see where the conversation takes you.

3

Don't worry about having the perfect conversation - we are only human after all.

“

LEADER CARDS

”

TIPS FOR HAVING A CHECK-IN

for leaders

Suggested timing:

15-20 mins at least once a month

A check-in is an opportunity to catch up, show appreciation, agree or adjust priorities, discuss recent work and provide coaching. Tell your team when you're available so they can book their own check-in.

- A check-in doesn't need to be long - little and often check-ins are better.
- There is no need to keep a record of a check-in - but you can if you want to, or your team member can.
- Give it your undivided attention. Why not agree to turn your phones off while you have your check-in - oh and try not to cancel.
- A check-in can take place anywhere - why not go for a walk, or do over the phone?
- This is their performance, ask them to prepare if they need to.
- Ask if they want to talk about something else as well e.g. career, health, etc.

THE CHECK-IN CONVERSATION

for leaders



Conversation Starters

- How are things going? Tell me about what you're working on?
- How happy do you feel about things right now?
- How can we make better use of your strengths?
- Do we need to adjust or change any of our team goals?
- Can I share where I think you are in terms of achieving your goals?
- Which of your co-workers would you praise and why?
- Let me tell you what I thought you did fantastically this week ...
- If there's one thing I'd like to see you do more of/ less of it's ...
- Let me share what I know about how the business is doing.
- What can I do differently to make work better for you?



TIPS FOR HAVING CAREER CONVERSATIONS

- for leaders

Suggested timing: 30-45 mins quarterly

Today's flatter structures mean it's not always possible to move up the career ladder. But that doesn't mean everyone needs to stay in the same place. Career development today is about making the most of your team members' strengths, giving them the chance to learn new skills and opening doors for them.

- Match team members' strengths to movement and opportunities in the team.
- Be honest and transparent about career opportunities.
- Champion advancement - be known for opening new doors and connecting people.
- It's not always possible to give a pay rise every time a team member takes on additional responsibilities, so think of another way of showing your appreciation in ways that matter to them.
- A career conversation doesn't have to be about changing roles. Why not focus on how they can get better at what they do today?

THE CAREER CONVERSATION

for leaders



Conversation Starters

- Tell me about your aspirations - short and longer term?
- How have you grown in the last few months?
- How can we take advantage of opportunities in your current position to learn new skills?
- Let me tell you what I think are your biggest strengths and how we can utilise them.
- Let's think about what we can do now to help you with your future aspirations?
- What makes you stay here and what would make you want to leave?
- I think a sideways move to ... would be great for you right now.
- Let's discuss some ideas about how you might get that development.
- Is there anyone I can introduce you to who could help you?



TIPS FOR HAVING REWARD CONVERSATIONS

- for leaders

Suggested timing: at least annually

Having a conversation about pay can be awkward, but it's an important discussion to have - the more open and honest the better. If you are able, take the issue of money off the table and pay well that is the ideal, but if you are restricted by budget or you already pay market rate you may need to explore other options to recognise. Why not surprise and delight great performance with spot rewards that are thoughtful e.g. time off, vouchers, development etc. and of course, let's not forget the power of personal thanks and appreciation.

Prepare in advance by thinking through these questions:

- Can I articulate our approach to reward here and what is in my control?
- Do I know what matters most to this team member and what they most value or need at this point?
- How do they stack up against their peers?
- What would they need to do to make a valuable contribution in the future?

THE REWARD CONVERSATION

for leaders



Conversation starters

- Let me explain our approach to reward here.
- How are you feeling about your reward package in general?
- Do you think your reward reflects your contribution, and if not why?
- This is where I see your reward package is at the moment e.g. below market rate, above market rate etc.
- The other factors that make up your reward package are ... e.g. pension, life insurance, etc.
- Let me tell you what changes I'm proposing and why.
- Which things matter most to you in your life right now? (security, flexibility, development, etc).
- What concerns do you have about your reward?
- To achieve a higher level of reward you'd need to ... (develop these skills, be prepared to move, take more responsibility etc).



TIPS FOR HAVING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- for leaders

A difficult conversation could be one of the hardest parts of being a leader. It's no fun for the person on the receiving end either. Be known as a leader that nips issues in the bud.

- It's natural to be defensive when we hear something we don't like. Take time out to reflect.
- Do it alone. Involving others will often change the dynamic to one of confrontation.
- Avoid the feedback sandwich to soften the blow - anything negative might be buried. Be kind with your language, but be straightforward.
- Have to hand specific examples of the issue. It's not fair for example to say "you're always late for meetings". Be specific about which meetings they were late for.
- Reduce the impact of threat by getting your team member to lead on their own feedback, we are normally our own best critic!
- Be honest about the ideal outcome e.g. don't pretend you want them to improve if you've already made up your mind that you want them to leave.

THE DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

for leaders



Conversation examples

- The piece of work you agreed to deliver was due last week. How are you getting on?
- You seem unhappy to me so I wanted to have a chat and find out what's wrong and see what we can do?
- The quality of your work is good but your office outbursts are rubbing the team up the wrong way (give examples) so tell me what's going on and how I can help?
- You've had 3 lots of absence in the last month, so I wanted to have a chat. Is there anything you want to tell me or can I help in anyway?
- I'm not sure this is the right role for you because ... so let's talk about what we can do.
- How do you think work is going at the moment?
... I see, so you're struggling with this project?
... I want to help so let's talk about how we can get things back on track?





TEAM MEMBER
CARDS



TIPS FOR HAVING A CHECK-IN

for team members

Suggested timing:

15-20 mins at least once a month

These informal conversations are a great opportunity to agree priorities, discuss recent work, and get some feedback and coaching.

- Don't wait to be asked - request your own check-in.
- It's your performance - own it!
- If you want to talk about something else - career, health etc, say it.
- There is no need to keep a record of your check-in - but you can if you want to.
- A check-in doesn't need to be long - little and often check-ins are better.
- Give it your undivided attention. Why not agree to turn your phones off while you have your check-in - oh and try not to cancel.
- A check-in can take place anywhere - why not go for a walk, or have a call instead?
- If your manager is really pushed for time, ask when a quick check-in would work for them.

THE CHECK-IN CONVERSATION

for team members



Conversation Starters

- Let me share what I've been up to.
- How did you think I did at that meeting last week?
I thought ... went well but I think I could have done better at ...
- Do you think I'm on track with my objectives?
- Is there anything else I should be focusing on?
- Could you tell me how I could do ... better?
- How am I doing in general?
- Can you tell me a bit more about the business goals?
- Can I tell you about someone in the team who I think is great?
- Is there anything I should be doing differently?
- Can I ask for your support with something?



TIPS FOR HAVING CAREER CONVERSATIONS

- for team members

Suggested timing: 30-45 mins quarterly

Today's flatter structures mean it's not always easy to move up the career ladder. But that doesn't mean everyone needs to stay in the same place. Career development today is about playing to your strengths, getting exposure to new skills and trying out new things. It's your career, so don't wait for your manager to set one up - ask for one yourself.

- Talk to your manager about changing your role to emphasize the aspects of your job that you are good at and love.
- Think creatively about how to develop new skills or be happier at work e.g. projects, shadowing, a mentor, etc ...
- Talk with your coworkers to find out where their interests lie. Perhaps you can trade off a component of your job that you dislike. Maybe they would enjoy something that you hate!

THE CAREER CONVERSATION

for team members



Conversation Starters

- Can I share my aspirations - short and longer term?
- These are some of the things I've been doing recently to develop and learn ...
- Can we discuss my strengths and how I can make better use of them?
- Can you help me understand how I progress to ... ?
- I am thinking a sideways move to ... would be good for my development - what do you think?
- I have been thinking about what I want to learn next and would like to discuss ideas with you.
- Would you be able to introduce me to a mentor who could help me develop in ... ?



TIPS FOR HAVING REWARD CONVERSATIONS

- for team members

Suggested timing: at least annually

Having a conversation about pay can be awkward, but it's an important discussion to have - the more open and honest the better (even if at times you don't get the answer you were hoping for!).

Prepare in advance by thinking through these questions:

- Do I understand the approach to pay and rewards here?
- What really matters to me today e.g. flexibility, money, development ...
- What contribution am I making now and what about the future?
- How would I like to be recognised for my contribution?
- Do I understand how my reward might change now and in the future?
- Do I really want more money, or do I just want to feel more valued?

THE REWARD CONVERSATION

for team members



Reward conversation starters

- How would you sum up my contribution?
- Can you tell me how I stack up against my peers?
- What is the approach to pay and reward here?
- The most valuable thing to me at the moment is ...
e.g. cash, development, time off, new responsibility.
- These are the changes I would like to see in my
reward package and why.
- What do I need to do to make a valuable
contribution in the future?



TIPS FOR HAVING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- for team members

Being on the receiving end of a difficult conversation is not great, but how you respond will make all the difference to the outcome and how you feel about yourself.

- If you know what the conversation is going to be about, take ownership and lead by sharing your thoughts first - you are your best critic and you will feel less threatened.
- Hopefully the leader is giving you this feedback because they want you to succeed - try and remember that when your emotions are rocketing.
- Give your leader a break if they deliver feedback clumsily - they are probably as anxious as you.
- All feedback of course is subjective and you may not agree with it, or think it's fair. Try and accept it's their view and work together to put things right.
- Take responsibility. If you don't like your job or something is bothering you, do something about it.
- Negative feedback naturally sparks defensive or angry behaviour. Take time to reflect before you respond.

THE DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

for team members



Conversation examples

- I know that piece of work was due last week but I'm really struggling with it. Can you help me?
- I want to explain my office outbursts. The culture here is not what I'm used to and I'm struggling to adjust. I want to change, can you help?
- I know you want to find out why I've been off sick so much. As a single parent childcare is causing me all sorts of problems ...
- What do you think I could do differently, so I can get back on track?
- If I could get some support with ... I really think it would help.
- I just don't feel that I'm playing to my strengths and it's demotivating me. Are we able to discuss options?

