

Conversations that Matter: *Harnessing Energy + Engagement in Today's Workforce*

Workshop Objectives

- ▶ Consider how engagement and generational differences effect conversations
- ▶ Explore the employee experience and workplace conversations
- ▶ Learn about approaches and questions that are most effective
- ▶ Determine next steps to enhance your conversations

Opening: Think about a great conversation you recently had with a direct report or a peer. With a partner, share some of the attributes or things they said that made it a great conversation.

As our workforce shifts, we quest for a high-performance culture where employees are engaged while working in alignment towards shared goals and outcomes to meet the needs of those served.

Communication Purpose

- ✓ To increase productivity, engagement and retention
- ✓ To understand and maximize employee's interests, strengths and skills

Communication Benefits

- ✓ Allows people to collaborate and find common ground
- ✓ Share different perspectives and reveal assumptions
- ✓ Build trusting relationships and create new solutions
- ✓ Useful for problem-solving and trouble-shooting
- ✓ Enhances coaching and the interpretation of results/behaviors

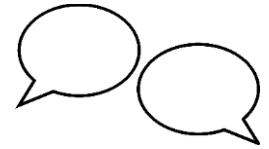
Strengths-Based Approach to Conversations

A strengths-based approach assumes that people are inherently more engaged and therefore, more productive when leveraging their natural talents. When employees are empowered to apply their strengths in the work, they have a higher level of energy which transmits to coworkers and residents.

Generational Communication

Traditionalist (1922-1945)	Baby Boomer (1946-1964)	Generation X (1965-1980)	Generation Y (Millennials) (1981-2000)
Use inclusive language Focus on words not body language Use more formal language Don't waste time Face to face is best	Use body language Speak in open and direct style Give details Avoid controlling language Show flexibility	Informality Use e-mail Short sound bites Facts and straight talk Listen and ask for feedback	Language should paint visual picture Use action verbs Text message for response Show respect and they will respect you Use humor

THE CONVERSATION: *Make it meaningful*



Tips for a Good Conversation*

1. Don't multitask; be present
2. Don't pontificate; assume you have something to learn
3. Ask open ended questions; invites more dialogue
4. Go with the flow; let go of those distracting thoughts
5. Say when you don't know
6. Don't equate your experience with the other person's experience; all experiences are individual
7. Try not to repeat yourself; it's condescending
8. Stay out of the weeds; they care about you not the details
9. **Listen!** "if your mouth is moving, you are not listening"
10. Be brief.

Source: How to Have a Good Conversation (TedTalk, Celeste Headlee) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6n3iNh4XLI>

Preparation for the conversation:

- ✓ What you want the individual to know, learn, discover, explore, or decide?
- ✓ Plan your questions
- ✓ How you want the individual to experience the conversation? See your intention
- ✓ What reactions might you anticipate?
- ✓ Determine what words of affirmation or gratitude you want to share

During the conversation:

- ✓ Give your full attention; actively listen
- ✓ Prepare yourself to listen by removing distractions (i.e., turn off your electronics, find a quiet/private spot to talk)
- ✓ Probe and ask questions such as: 'Tell me more about that?' 'Give me an example?'
- ✓ Practice patience; show empathy; challenge respectfully

At conclusion of conversation:

- ✓ Thank the individual for the conversation
- ✓ Use words of affirmation and gratitude

In Pairs: **What has helped you have a productive conversation?** or **Where do you get stuck in your conversations?**

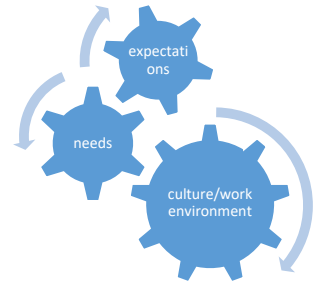
Focused Conversations

	ASPECT	SAMPLE QUESTIONS
Objective	<p>What do we know? <i>focus on the facts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide context about the situation/actions ✓ Be open and honest about expectations 	<p>What did you see, hear or read?</p> <p>What happened from your point of view?</p>
	<p>How the person feels about the information? <i>acknowledges personal reactions, associations, emotions (positive or apprehensive)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Affirm that everyone has valuable knowledge based on their unique experiences ✓ Recognize that there is always more than one perspective 	<p>What was your gut level reaction?</p> <p>How do you feel about the work you do?</p> <p>What part might I have contributed to this situation?</p>
Interpretive	<p>What does this mean? <i>meaning, values, significance, purpose, implications</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ask questions to understand and repeat back key information ✓ Be curious 	<p>What new insight did you get from this?</p> <p>What have you noticed?</p>
	<p>What are we going to do? <i>resolution, action, future direction, next</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Agree on next steps and timelines ✓ Be responsive to suggestions and feedback 	<p>What do you think we should do?</p> <p>What can you and I do to xx?</p> <p>What is the first action you/we need to take?</p> <p>When can you and I meet again to check in?</p>
Decisional		

See [The Art of Focused Conversations](#) by Brian Stanfield, ICA Associates, Inc.

The Employee Experience

The employee experience is the intersection between the employee expectations, needs and wants and the organizational design and environment.



Conversation touch points

ONBOARDING	PERFORMANCE	DEVELOPMENT	RETENTION	TRANSITION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission, vision, values • Job Requirements • Culture Fit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals and measures • Expectations • Results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career aspiration, potential and growth opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment + satisfaction • Strengths + interests • Diversity + Inclusion • Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuity/ transition planning • Knowledge transfer
Tools/Approaches				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Mission, vision and values ✓ Job Standards ✓ Competencies + Credentials ✓ Stay Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ SMART Goals ✓ Job Expectations ✓ Performance Reviews ✓ Performance Improvement Plan ✓ Check ins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Coaching + Mentoring ✓ Career conversation ✓ Individual Development Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strengths, Values, Engagement and Diversity + Inclusion conversations ✓ Stay Interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Knowledge Transfer ✓ Exit Interview

At your table: How do you know that your employees are having a good experience within your organization?

Stay Interview

Purpose:

To discover what motivates employees, why they stay or what will keep them within the organization.

Benefits:

- Builds trust and deepens relationships
- Shows employee you care about them
- Allows employees to be heard
- Helps retain employees

Key Points:

Reasons employees leave employment:

- ✓ Change in job expectations (different from what they were hired to do)
- ✓ Doing work they are not good at
- ✓ Feel unheard or are disengaged in the work
- ✓ Team dynamics or organizational culture are not a fit
- ✓ Minimal promotional opportunities

When to Use:

- Sometime after 60-90 days so employee has some time in role
- Stay interviews are a great way to determine how the employee is adjusting at the half way mark of their probationary period

Note: do not address performance in these conversations

Questions:

1. What gives you the most meaning for you at work?
2. What jobs, activities, or challenges energize you?
3. In what ways does your work makes a difference?
4. What do you notice when you are having a great day?
5. What do you most appreciate about your team? Your manager?
6. What makes you proud to be a [organization] employee?
7. What strengths, talents, interests or skills do you have that we haven't made the most of?
8. What do you wish you could spend time on at work?
9. What did you love in your last position or organization that you're not doing now?
10. If you won the lottery and left our organization, what would you miss most about your job?
11. What are other career opportunities you'd like to pursue?
12. What kind of recognition would be meaningful to you?

Performance

Purpose:	To assess individual performance to support accomplishments of the strategic objectives of the organization.
Benefits:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supports a more efficient, productive, and healthy work environment.• Creates feedback loops between supervisor and employee• Rewards and recognizes staff for a job well done; increases engagement and commitment
Key Points:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Performance management allows the organization to achieve its goals✓ Set clear expectations, job standards and goals to set staff up for success✓ Coach for results; leverage strengths; address deficiencies✓ By investing your time you show you care about the person
When to Use:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• At annual performance review• At weekly/monthly progress check in• When there is a negative result or behavior that needs to be addressed.• To explore changes to work duties or goals• When showing appreciation
Questions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Describe what you were most proud of this past week/month/year.2. What accomplishments over the past year are you most proud of that contribute to our organization's success or within our community?3. How do you think you did (or are doing) in achieving your goals?4. How does the mission/purpose of the organization/department make you feel your work is valuable?5. What support or resources do you need to be successful?6. What are some things that help you do your best work each day?7. What strengths, talents, interests or skills could we make the most of?8. What kind of recognition would be meaningful to you?9. How can I support you and/or what resources might you need?

Career Development

Purpose:

To show an interest in an employee's career by understanding their aspirations and interests.

Benefits:

- Each employee has the opportunity to express their career goals
- Aspirations, interest and readiness to move into a leadership role or expanded responsibilities are known
- Employee receives feedback through honest dialogue and manager can better support the employee's growth and development

Key Points:

Interest in career aspirations can create greater engagement and commitment to the organization especially when developmental goals are supported.

When to Use:

- Yearly or when role changes
- Check in at annual performance review

Questions:

1. What is your work experience/education prior to this position?
2. What activities in your job have you enjoyed the most and found most interesting? Which have you disliked? **Or** What do you enjoy most/least about your current position?
3. Describe a few key strengths and abilities that serve you well in your current role?
4. What are your most valuable talents and skills?
5. What accomplishments over the past year are you most proud of that contribute to our organization's success or within our community?
6. Which projects or activities from the past year are you most proud of?
7. Do you have an interest in pursuing additional responsibilities or a different role? If so, what would ideally would you like to be doing?
8. Which development activity can you start on now that would be most beneficial to achieving your short-term goals? Your long-term goals?
9. How can I help and support you in your current role and assist in your development?

Sample Individual Development Plan

Name: _____ Date: _____

PROFESSIONAL GOALS What (or where) do I desire to be in my professional life? Personal goals for the next years include:	
Goal #1 Goal #2 Goal #3	
TALENTS OR STRENGTHS TO USE MORE What are my talent and strengths:	DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES What are important areas for me to improve?
→ →	→ →
ACTION STEPS What are a few steps I can take to use a strength more often, improve a development area and make progress on my goals?	
→ →	
RESOURCES What resources, support or feedback do I need to take action toward my goals?	
STATUS Progress and successes	

1. What are your career goals for the next year or two?
2. What work experiences, skill building, education, networking or other development would you need to attain your development goals?
3. What projects, committees or other responsibilities would you like to be a part of to help develop your career? Is there another department/area you would like to learn more about?
4. What are you already doing to reach you short- and long-term goals?

	Strengths	Employee Engagement
Purpose:	To enhance engagement, commitment and productivity by leveraging employee’s talents which transmits to co-workers and customers.	To determine satisfaction and commitment by understanding what motivates them to perform and why they stay with the organization.
Benefits:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When people invest energy in developing their strengths instead of correcting their deficiencies, they are more likely to grow. • Focusing and leveraging strengths rather than fixing weaknesses creates more positive energy and minimizes negative reactions such as defensiveness or resistance to change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance at consistently high levels; even beyond job description • Employee use their talents and strengths at work every day and stay interested in their work • There is enthusiasm and a positive connection to work, team, organization
Key Points:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A more energized and productive work environment becomes a magnet for those seeking to be part of an organization. ✓ A strengths orientation provides flexibility and appreciation for diversity and increases personal growth and development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Success depends on authentic engagement and will have meaning only when demonstrated with sincerity. ✓ Engagement should be a part of how we do business every day. ✓ Doing nothing is costing us.
When to Use:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate strengths-based questions into all conversations to create a positive orientation. • Utilize this conversation when debriefing a StrengthsFinder assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you notice the employee is disengaged or perhaps could be challenged more • There is an opportunity to debrief employee survey results • When a team is newly forming or shifts
Questions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you do well? Which strengths contribute to this? 2. How do your strengths influence how you think about your role? 3. Where could you be using your strengths more in your work/your relationships? 4. What areas would you like to build on or strengthen? 5. Thinking back, what is something that has always come naturally for you? 6. What about your work motivates you the most? or makes you successful? 7. Tell me about some of the biggest challenges in your life? How did you overcome them? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What makes for a great day at work? 2. What is most important about the work you do? 3. When you think of engagement how would you describe it? 4. What is one thing you most enjoy about your job, team, organization? 5. What would make you more engaged? or What is one thing could you start doing to increase your fulfillment or impact? How could you make that happen? 6. What would make the ways we work more inclusive? 7. Tell me about 2-3 behaviors that you excel at that foster inclusion? 8. What support do you need to actively practice and model inclusive behaviors? 9. Would you recommend our organization to a friend or family member?

Knowledge Transfer

Purpose:

To communicate formal or informal information, situations or relationships that would assist an incoming employee in the execution of their job duties.

Benefits:

- Seamless transfer of knowledge around policies, practices, process, and relationships
- Allows management to consider opportunities for improvements prior to filling vacancies or reassigning work tasks
- Fosters business continuity and minimizes disruptions to productivity
- Allows understanding of existing employees' job-specific knowledge
- Facilitates learning for incoming employee and supports a positive onboarding experience

Key Points:

Knowledge transfer can be accomplished in several ways, including:

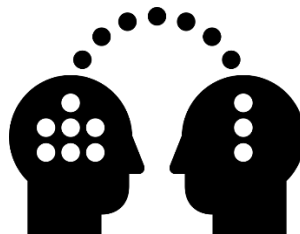
- ✓ Experiential: on-the-job learning, acting assignments, and job mobility.
- ✓ Relationships: mentoring relationships, coaching, or joining a community of practice
- ✓ Planning: assess workforce needs and job requirements
- ✓ Documentation: anticipate what someone needs to know

When to Use:

At the time when someone gives notice they are moving to a new role in the organization or exiting the organization.

Questions:

1. What information (policies, procedures, etc.) is critical to document and pass along?
2. What relationships are important to business strategy/operations?
3. What experiences might be beneficial for the incumbent?
4. What systems or practices are critical to achieving success in the role?



Exit Interview

Purpose:	To gather important information about an employee's job duties and experience before they exit their role or the organization.
Benefits:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides mechanism for honest feedback to improve engagement strategies and/or identify management gaps/strengths.• Promotes positive relationships and goodwill toward the organization.• Informs how to retain top performers• Shows appreciation for the skills, knowledge and abilities of the person exiting their role/organization
Key Points:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ For the most honest feedback a neutral party should conduct the interview (i.e., HR or a supervisor outside of the chain of command).✓ Surveys provide a sense of privacy for sensitive feedback.✓ In person interviews allows you to probe deeper.
When to Use:	At the end of employment either in person or via a survey.
Questions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How did the mission/purpose of the organization/department make you feel your work was valuable?2. If you could have changed some aspects about your role or the work environment, what would you have liked to see different?3. How was the balance between your work and personal life while working here?4. Describe the support you received from your manager, such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Received fair treatment• Recognized on the job• Encouraged growth and supported development• Resolved complaints and problems• Supported well-being; cared for me as a person5. What was most/least satisfying about your job?6. Would you recommend the organization to your family and friends?



REFLECTION

Q: What is 1 or 2 things you could apply to your conversations?

Recommended Reading



Crucial Conversations: Tools for talking when stakes are high (2002), Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan Al Switzler, McGraw-Hill.

Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most (1999), Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, Sheila Heen, Penguin Books.

Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life, One Conversation at a time (2002), Susan Scott, Berkley Books, New York.

One Page Talent Management: Eliminating complexity, adding value (2010), Marc Efren and Mariam Ort, Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation.

The Center for Creative Leadership: Handbook of Leadership Development (2010), Ellen Van Valor, Cynthia D. McCauley, and Marian N. Radarman, John Wiley & Sons.

[Workforce of Tomorrow](http://transformgov.org/en/research/lgrc/workforce_of_tomorrow), Local Government Research Collaborative, Center for State and Local Government Excellence http://transformgov.org/en/research/lgrc/workforce_of_tomorrow

[State and Local Government Workforce: 2018 Trends](#), Center for State and Local Government Excellence

Questions/Comments/Consultation:

Jan Williams, PHR, PMP
Leadership Development Consultant
and Executive and EQi Coach

Email: williamsjanm@gmail.com

Cell: [612.803.2235](tel:612.803.2235)

<http://www.linkedin.com/in/williamsjanm>