

# CONSTRUCTIVE COACHING CONVERSATIONS

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Most coaching opportunities happen in the day-to-day conversations you have with performers, conversations that produce learning and performance improvement.

It is a maxim of coaching that “the players can’t see themselves play”. One thing of value you can always offer as a coach is another perspective, another view of what’s happening. Performers may not be in the right place to check results, or may not appreciate the real impact of their actions. Your perspective, offered constructively, may be enough to make learning happen.

Ultimately, coaching conversations should...

- *Improve performance*—help the performer make a bigger contribution toward the goals of the team or better achieve their personal goals;
- *Enhance the performer's capability*—both their competence and commitment; and,
- *Improve your relationship*—with the performer, enabling other, larger coaching actions.

Consider these options for more effective coaching conversations...

*Learn More About “What’s Happening” By Listening & Questioning*—Your observations of performance can only tell you part of the performance story. Until you talk with the performer, you will not have all the facts about the situation – what was happening, what they thought was happening, and what they did. Incomplete data can lead you to act on an incorrect interpretation of what happened, in a way that doesn't help and may even hurt.

Also, performers move from where they are, rather than from where you think they are or would like them to be. The more you listen, the better you'll hear their perceptions of what's happening, the reasons behind their action to date, and information critical to changing their behaviour.

*Challenge What They “See”*—New action requires new thinking. Even with new information about what’s happening,

performers may not take corrective action for a variety of reasons, including:

- They don’t see that they have any responsibility for changing it;
- They don’t see the value in taking any action;
- They don’t see that there is anything that can or should be done;
- They don’t see why things are happening clearly enough to take effective action.

Challenge these beliefs and assumptions. Offer alternative ways to see things—new possibilities, meanings, theories, connections—helping performers let go of unproductive thinking.

*Help Them “Choose” a Path*—In any situation, opportunity or threat, there are always alternatives. They are generally some variation on these themes: fix it, leave it or learn to live with it. Encourage performers to make a choice, to choose a path forward based on their broadened understanding of the situation. Help them clarify what they intend to produce, the new outcomes they will pursue. Many well-intended efforts fall short because they lack the focus of a clear goal.

*Develop Their Capability to “Do” What Needs Doing*—Explore how the performer will work to achieve the goal. As needed, teach them a skill, technique or practice, or offer alternative learning resources. When they know how to do it one way, show them some helpful alternatives in case the first doesn't work. The more alternatives they see and can implement, the better their response to challenges, and the less dependent they will be on intervention from you.

*Plan for “Review”* - If it is worthwhile to intervene in the first place, it is worth following up. The effort you make to check what happens as a result of the performance conversation communicates much about the commitment you have to the performer and their performance.

*"Organizations learn only through individuals who learn.  
Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning.  
But without it, no organizational learning occurs."* Peter Senge

### COACHING CONVERSATION POSSIBILITIES

Think for a moment about a coaching issue or problem you've been working on for some time; a situation where you have been disappointed with the results. Consider the questions below. *What can you learn that might help you be more successful in the future?*

