

## WELCOME TO THE CONVERSATIONS TOOLKIT FOR TEAM MEMBERS

Rather than waiting for your line manager to fix a meeting with you, why not take the lead on finding out how you are doing and how to progress your career? After all, it's your performance and your career - and no-one knows you better than you!

This conversations toolkit is designed around the key interactions with your manager to help you get the best from them. It might be a regular check-in about what you're working on, a chat about your next career move, or even a difficult conversation. The toolkit works face-to-face or virtually.

In the toolkit you will find tips and conversation starters to help it go smoothly.

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# 1. CHECK-IN

This is not a formal meeting but an informal opportunity to agree priorities, discuss recent work outcomes, and get some feedback and coaching.

**Here are a few tips for a great check-in:**

## 1. Do it often

A check-in doesn't need to be long – little and often check-ins are often much better, and can happen anywhere, including over Teams or Zoom.

## 2. You are in control

It's your performance - own it. Set your own agenda for what you want to discuss and ask for feedback. If you want to talk about something else – career, pay, health etc., say it.

## 3. Keep it informal

There is no need to keep a record of your check-in unless you want to.

## 4. When works for you

All of us will need a different level of support at different times. Discuss with your manager how often you would like to meet - perhaps ask them when's good for them.

# 1. CHECK-IN

**Here are a few conversation starters to help you have a great check-in:**

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

## 2. CAREER CONVERSATIONS

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 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 if you can talk about your career in your next check-in.

**Here are a few tips for a great careers chat:**

### 1. Help your manager to get to know you better

What are your aspirations, your strengths, your development needs, your motivations? When they know these things about you, they can help identify the best way to lead, coach and train you.

### 2. Get creative

We all learn in different ways, so think creatively about how to develop new skills or stretch yourself e.g. projects, shadowing, a mentor, etc...

### 3. Play to your strengths

Talk to your manager about changing your role to emphasise the aspects of your job that you are good at and love. Also talk with your co-workers to find out where their interests lie so you could potentially trade off a component of your job that you dislike but that they enjoy!

## 2. CAREER CONVERSATIONS

**Here are some conversation starters to help you:**

- 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 ...?

## 3. FEELING GOOD ABOUT WORK

When you feel good about work, it really makes all the difference doesn't it! Your regular check-ins are a good opportunity to chat through anything on your mind or what your manager can do to help you feel good about work.

**Here are some tips to help you:**

### 1. Discuss flexibility that works for you and the team

Even if your organisation has not adopted hybrid working, there is still an opportunity for you to discuss what flexible working means for you and how it could work at the team level.

### 2. Bring your whole self to work

It might only take some small change in your manager's behaviour to help you feel more included/appreciated. Suggest having discussions with the wider team to understand others' perspectives.

### 3. Recognition matters

Discuss how you like to be appreciated for a job well done – public recognition, learning opportunities, increased flexibility around where and when you work, an experience as a gift or just plain old money!

### 4. Doing away with what gets in the way

Rules and layers of approval can build up over time and get unnecessarily complicated. Have an honest conversation around what might be removed/reduced to make it easier for you to do your job.

### 3. FEELING GOOD ABOUT WORK

**Here are some conversation starters you can try:**

- I'd find it really helpful if I could work from home a bit more. How do you think we could make this work?
- I wanted to let you know what makes me stressed at work and what I think would help me.
- You're so kind to have given me 'xxx' for my efforts on the last project. If you're ever struggling with how to reward me next time, I'd love a 'xxx'!
- I think there might be an alternative to how we do 'xxx'. Would you be willing to give it a shot?
- These are some of the barriers I'm currently experiencing at work ... could you coach me to tackle them?
- 'xxx' incident at our last team meeting made me feel excluded. You probably didn't realise but would it be OK if next time we try doing 'xxx'?

## 4. DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Having or being on the receiving end of a difficult conversation is not great for anyone, but how you handle it will make all the difference to the outcome. Here are some tips to help you.

**If you are receiving some difficult feedback:**

### 1. Take ownership

If you know what the conversation is going to be about, own it and lead by sharing your thoughts first – you are after all your best critic and you will feel less threatened.

### 2. Keep a check on your emotions

Negative feedback naturally sparks defensive or angry behaviour, particularly if we don't agree with it or it's delivered clumsily. Take some time to reflect before you respond and think about asking a few trustworthy sources whether they agree with the feedback before you respond.

### 3. Ask for specific examples

Always ask for specific examples so you are able to understand the impact your action or behaviour has had and better explain the situation if needed.

### 4. Decide future course of action

If you can understand why you've had the feedback, be clear about what you are going to do differently. For e.g. 'We've agreed that next week I am going to ... and you're going to help me by ... and we're going to meet up again in a week to see how it's going.'



## 4. DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

**Here are some conversation starters you can try:**

- I know that piece of work was due last week but I'm really struggling with it. Can you help me?
- When you micromanage me I feel like you don't trust me and believe this is causing my recent behaviour so would you be willing to adapt your style
- I want to explain my office outbursts. The culture here is not what I'm used to and I'm struggling to adjust. Can I share what's going on for me?
- 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, but I don't want it to impact m
- I appreciate your honesty. 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?

## 4. DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Delivering feedback upwards is a skill you can develop, and it is increasingly important if your manager's performance impacts you and your work outcomes. Here are some tips to help you..

**If you need to deliver difficult feedback:**

### 1. Don't wait too long

This can be a hard conversation for many, but don't wait too long before getting started. Behaviours are easier to change before they become a habit!

### 2. Focus on the solution

Rather than placing emphasis on the problem, focus on what solution you think will provide the best outcome. This enables the feedback to be truly constructive.

### 3. Put yourself in their shoes

It helps to look at things from the manager's perspective so you can empathise during the conversation. For example, if they manage a large team or have tight deadlines to meet.

## 4. DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

**Here are some conversation starters you can try:**

- It must be hard managing a large team like ours, but it would really help me to have more regular check-ins with you.
- I know you have so many projects running currently but I'm having trouble keeping on top of my 'to-do' list! Can we discuss it so you can help me prioritise and manage it?
- I've been asked to do 'xxx' for this project but until last week I was doing 'xxx'. Please can you clarify how you'd like me to approach this?
- You mentioned during our team call that you didn't like how I approached 'xxx' on this project. I really appreciate feedback as it helps me improve but next time could you tell me in private what the issue was and how you would have done it differently?
- Sometimes I feel like you don't trust me and feel like I'm being supervised too closely. Could we discuss how I could give you more confidence in my abilities?