Navigating and managing performance feedback conversations can be challenging, which is why it is important to take some time to reflect and prepare for such conversations – whether you are giving feedback when the need arises or during an annual performance evaluation meeting. Giving constructive feedback is important when you...

- want to reinforce, develop, and recognize an employee’s successful performance
- coach and guide an employee about what behaviors and/or performance outcomes need to change or improve; or
- help an employee adapt to changes that impact the employee’s job

This is a navigational guide to help you prepare and practice techniques that will encourage vs. discourage conversation. These techniques may also be applied when preparing to receive feedback.

START WITH YOURSELF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ask yourself...</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is my intent in having this conversation? Is it to give/get feedback; show appreciation; give/get advice; give direction; assign work; make a request; ask for support; suggest changes...?</td>
<td>I want to thank Emma for filling in for an absent employee and doing a job that she does not like doing. Emma is a grading assistant in Physics and Chemistry. She fills in for Biology when Jacob is out, but doesn’t really like doing that.</td>
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<td>What is the outcome I want to achieve?</td>
<td>I want Emma to know I appreciate what she did and why I think she does a great job. I would like Emma to feel more comfortable doing this job again in the future, when necessary. I also want to understand why Emma doesn’t like doing this assignment, identify any barriers and explore changes we can make to help her.</td>
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<td>What conversations have I had about this in the past? Is there anything documented?</td>
<td>Other than to schedule Emma to cover for an absent employee, I really haven’t talked to her about this before.</td>
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<td>Have I contributed to this situation either in a positive or negative manner?</td>
<td>I haven’t explained how important it is to work as a team and that others fill in for Emma when she is out.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What can I do differently?</td>
<td>I haven’t explored why Emma does not like the job. In the past I just told her to do it and that it was within the scope of her responsibilities to do it...no questions asked!</td>
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<tr>
<td>What to consider...</td>
<td>Example</td>
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<tr>
<td>Start with the big picture and how the employee’s job or the specific subject of your conversation fits into it.</td>
<td>Emma, our department provides an important service to our faculty and students. You and Jacob are graders and I expect both of you to back each other up when either of you is out or needs help. You did that yesterday for Jacob and I appreciate it.</td>
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<td>Give your feedback on the employee’s performance and give a clear example. Without a clear example the employee may not know why the employee did a great/good/poor job.</td>
<td>Based on what I saw and heard from faculty you did a great job <strong>BECAUSE</strong> you finished grading the Biology tests by the deadline; you knew when to ask for help; and faculty and students did not have to wait for results.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engage the employee in conversation by asking questions</td>
<td>Emma, tell me how you think yesterday went when you filled in for Jacob? What did you do that made all the requests go so smoothly? You told me the last time you covered for Jacob that you did not like doing his job...please help me understand why. What can we do so that your concerns are addressed?</td>
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<td>Explain the impact of the employee’s need to continue to do a good job – or – the impact when performance does not meet expectations.</td>
<td>Emma, when you fill in for Jacob it makes a difference in the service we provide because we do not have to delay giving grades to the faculty and students. Making our deadlines also has an impact on the Registrar’s Office.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Define the expectation for continuing and future performance.</td>
<td>You really do a great job because you ensure that your scoring is accurate, you know when to obtain clarification from faculty, and you are consistent – whether you are grading for your departments or as a backup. It is my expectation that you will continue to back up Jacob and others when needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss and jointly identify resources to help the employee achieve success.</td>
<td>I spoke with Jacob and several faculty – they will put together a guide to help you with Biology tests so that you become more familiar with the terms used in the tests. Jacob will also go over some tests with you and show you what he does.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summarize agreements and next steps</td>
<td>We agreed that you will meet with Jacob and use the guide the next time you cover for Biology. After that, we will regroup and assess how it went.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depending on the circumstances, if there is no change or improvement after you have given guidance and feedback, and the employee has had the opportunity to make corrections or improve, you may find it necessary to advise the employee of possible consequences.</td>
<td>There is no one way to explain consequences since it depends on individual circumstances.</td>
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A MENU OF QUESTIONS

More questions are available on the self-evaluation forms on the HR website at https://www.hmc.edu/human-resources/performance-evaluation-forms-and-resources/.

Think about what you want to accomplish, what you need to know and then prepare your questions to guide your conversation with the employee. Your conversation should be two-sided. If you find that you are doing most of the talking – have some questions ready to engage the employee.

- Keep your questions **simple** – ask one thing at a time vs. asking about several things at once.
  - Ask – How did you manage finishing this project on time?
  - Don’t ask – How did you manage finishing this project on time; who did you collaborate with; did you use specific software?

- **Ask open-ended questions** vs. those that have a “yes” or “no” reply

- Think twice about asking **questions that begin with “why”** – some questions may put the employee on the defensive and make further conversation difficult
  - Ask – What is preventing you from finishing your projects on time?
  - Don’t ask – Why can’t you finish any of your projects on time?

- Ask questions to **gain the other person’s perspective and/or facilitate dialogue**
  - What do you think about _____?
  - How do you feel your performance has been?
  - In which areas do you think you should focus on developing?
  - What would help you develop in those areas?
  - What’s getting in the way of your success?
  - How can I help you succeed?
  - What haven’t you thought about?
  - Who can you collaborate with?
  - Are there resources we should consider to help you (e.g. training, books, mentoring, taking on a new assignment, committee work, etc.)?
  - What did you do to achieve a successful outcome?
  - What have you learned from this experience?
  - What would you do or not if you had to do this over again?
  - What might help you increase your effectiveness at ______________?
  - When you consider these job responsibilities_________, what opportunities do you see for your continued development?
  - Help me understand why/how/what …
  - Would you please give me an example …
  - Please tell me more about your reasons for doing …
  - Upon reflection, is there something you could or should have done differently to achieve a different outcome?

**OBTAINING FEEDBACK FROM OTHERS**

Most employees work independently as they provide services to and work with other employees, faculty and students. For that reason, what you may know or observe personally may be limited and you may need to obtain feedback from other individuals with whom an employee interacts. Let your employees know that you will be talking to other individuals and with whom you plan to speak.
Prepare questions with the goal of keeping your conversation simple, and decide if you want written or verbal responses. Here are a few sample questions:

- Where does ____ excel?
- What is one thing that ____ could do to become more effective?
- How do you find working with ____? (Ask follow up questions to one-word answers.)
- Tell me about a typical experience you have had working with ______?

**MEET WITH THE EMPLOYEE AT THE RIGHT TIME AND THE RIGHT PLACE**

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<tr>
<th>Schedule and Explain</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<td>Schedule a meeting in advance or meet at the moment if both of you have time. (What you do may depend on the topic of the conversation.)</td>
<td>Hi, Emma. After lunch would you please meet with me in my office?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the extent possible, explain what you want to talk about; be clear if the employee needs to bring something to the meeting or prepare in advance. The more mysterious you are the more nervous or upset an employee may become.</td>
<td>I want to talk to you about yesterday when you filled in for Jacob because he was out. I thought everything went well and would like to take some time debrief with you.</td>
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**LISTEN and ACKNOWLEDGE**

Listening is an active skill – not a passive one. As tempting as it is to respond to a knock on your door, read an email or text message, or answer the phone – don’t do it! When you meet with someone to give feedback, it is about that person and not about you or how busy you are. Listening and learning from an employee goes a long way in building rapport and trust.

Acknowledge what you are hearing and learning – you can do that by paraphrasing what you heard or asking questions to check your understanding.

**WHAT IF IN THE END YOU DON’T AGREE?**

If you and an employee do not agree with your assessment and feedback, take the time to ask questions and understand the employee’s perspective. Ask for specific examples and other questions that will give you the information you need to consider (see the above Menu of Questions).

You need not respond immediately to an employee who disagrees with your assessment. It is OK to take time to give it thoughtful consideration. After doing so, your options are to:

1. modify your assessment if you agree it is warranted, either in whole or in part; or
2. keep your original assessment and not make any changes if you conclude that it is appropriate and backed by facts and specific examples. Sometimes the only agreement you may reach is to agree to disagree.

Once you make a decision, take time to explain to the employee why and how you arrived at your decision.