

Positive Performance Conversations

A mini ebook from Joy Van Skiver
The POWERformance Group



Every performance conversation has the potential for being a positive experience for both managers and team members. That's true whether it's an annual discussion or a regularly scheduled check-in.

“Positive” doesn’t mean that everyone receives only praise and nothing negative is discussed. “Positive” means the outcome is positive.

People leave the conversation feeling positive, not devastated, depressed, disheartened or disillusioned. Ideally, people also feel motivated to move ahead.

According to the research firm Gartner, effective performance conversations can increase enterprise contribution by up to 20%. Since “positive” fits within the definition of “effective,” getting primed for positive performance conversations makes great sense. In the end it's a plus for everybody, including our companies!

With that perspective in mind, I'd like to offer a few simple and practical tips for both managers and for team members.

Managers — This is for you. (But everybody should read it!)

Reflection

The most productive performance discussions start before you meet with a team member. They start with 3 or 4 minutes of reflection. Time to get your thoughts together. Time to come up with a plan.

To stay focused on what matters most, remember that every person has a right to know the answers to three essential questions:

What did I do well?
What do I need to improve?
What action do I need to take?

Mentally, trade places with the person you're meeting with. Take a 3- x 3-inch Post-it® Note and write three words on it:

Well

Improve

Action

As you answer those three questions, write key words on your Post-it Note. Why bother with that step? When you write something, you're more likely to remember it. If you don't remember, you can easily pull out your Post-it Note to refer to during your meeting. Unlike a large note pad or a Word document, a Post-it Note forces you to be precise and succinct.

Dialogue

Use the same three questions in your meeting to initiate dialogue. See if you and your team members share the same viewpoint. You'll already have your viewpoint in mind, but the person you're meeting with may convince you there's more to consider.

“How can I help you?” is a great question to have in your back pocket. Pull it out when you recognize that someone needs extra support, or use it as your final discussion point.

Your two-way conversation — dialogue not monologue — can be energizing, stimulating, motivating, and just plain interesting. Dare I say enjoyable?

Team Members — This is for you. (But everybody should read it!)

- Use the same Post-it Note Reflection process I suggested for your manager, writing down key words that summarize **your** answers to those three essential questions.
- Be prepared to highlight your successes even before your manager asks. You're responsible for communicating what you know you did well.
- Accept the opportunity to grow, and go into that meeting ready to talk about what will help you bring your best to work every day.
- Ask *How* and *What* questions to ensure you understand exactly what your manager expects.

How and What Questions

What action do you have in mind?

What would you suggest I focus on?

How should I proceed?

What's most important in the short term?

How can I contribute to the success of our team?

You're responsible for communicating what you know you did well.

For All—

Finally, for both managers and team members, always discuss the future, not just the past. Although a future focus is primarily the responsibility of the manager, team members need to be ready to turn the conversation in that direction.

If your manager seems to be stuck on what happened in the past—what can't be changed—here are a few words that might come in handy:

“You’re right, that didn’t turn out the way we expected it to. What can I do to ensure that I meet expectations going forward?”



As is often the case in communication, dialogue can be the route to positive experiences. When you work things out together, with give-and-take, you can expect a positive outcome.

Try it Out

- Before your next one-to-one, use the Post-it Note technique to ensure you have a plan.
- During that one-to-one, ask *How* and *What* questions. Also, be sure to look ahead by talking about the future.
- After the one-to-one, reflect for a minute and decide: Was this one of your best performance conversations?

joy.vanskiver@powerformance.com

www.powerformance.com

973-822-8400

