
CAREER CONVERSATIONS IN A REMOTE SETTING

2020-21 has been full of unprecedented challenges for us - as a University, as teams, and as individuals. Our ways of interacting and working together have changed significantly. If you have not yet had the opportunity to reflect on these changes with your direct reports through Career Conversations, now is the time to do so.

Career Conversations in a Remote Environment

- The way you evaluate your direct reports in a remote environment will likely be different than when you saw each other regularly in-person
 - Clarity about goals, expectations, behaviors, and outcomes may have changed.
 - Complex and shifting responsibilities at home and at work means many people are working in a modified manner. Please be compassionate about these changes.
 - Focus on growth and learning, not just transactional outcomes. Behaviors such as resiliency, collaboration, empathy, and adaptability should be taken into consideration.
 - Help employees move forward
 - Reflect on changes and provide feedback as to how direct reports can improve for the future. Simply reviewing past performance and outcomes is not an effective tool, considering all the uncertainty and changes of the past year.
 - Listen to and value employees' evaluations of themselves.
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Career Conversations Preparation

- Set expectations about this process ahead of time – employees might be anxious or nervous about the meeting, especially if it is their first career conversation.
 - Schedule the meeting with ample time for the employee to [prepare for the conversation](#).
 - Share the [SMART Goals template](#) with your employee and the link to this [SMART Goals video](#).
 - Provide employee with the [Career Conversations form](#) and ask them to fill it out prior to the meeting
 - Provide an opportunity for Q&A prior to the meeting regarding expectations.
 - Inform the employee of any additional attendees that will be a part of the career conversation process.
 - Conduct the Career Conversation on a video call. This will allow you to pick up on critical nonverbal cues and engage your employees in a more organic conversation.
 - Prepare for the conversation yourself. Career Conversations can motivate or demotivate an employee based on how the conversation is conducted. Try to be in a mental state of curiosity and appreciation as you conduct the meeting.
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Career Conversations Goals

- Focus on setting SMART employee goals
 - Set both Outcome Goals and Process Goals
 - Outcome Goals are the “What” or the results you want to achieve.
 - Process Goals are the “How” or actions or habits that will help you achieve them.
 - Set clear and objective goals – in a remote environment leaders do not have the ability to course correct employees through in-person observations or conversations. It is vital that remote employees understand their goals and how their success will be measured.
 - Help the employee prioritize their goals to ensure their time and energy is placed on the right initiatives.
 - Give employees stretch goals – challenging assignments will challenge them and grow their skillset.
 - Ensure goals have check in points and due dates to track progress.
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Conducting the Career Conversation

- To encourage growth, focus the discussion on achievements, learning and development opportunities, career aspirations, supervisor feedback, and employee self-reflection.
 - Positive Feedback – ensure feedback is specific and shows that you understand the individual’s role and their contributions.
 - Constructive Feedback – be prepared to provide an example, discuss the solution collaboratively, and set next steps and action items.
 - [Giving and Receiving Feedback](#) - Conversation Tactics
 - Before diving into the meeting, leave a few moments for social interaction. Engaging the employee in non-work-related topics such as family or holiday plans will lighten the mood and set the stage for a more productive and amicable discussion.
 - Start the meeting by sharing the intention behind the career conversation and how the conversation will be structured.
 - Conduct a two-way conversation instead of monologue – this will provide the employee with an opportunity to share their thoughts, ask questions, and openly discuss their needs and career-growth ambitions.
 - Utilize screen sharing to display relevant data and to provide a visual reference to the completed career conversation form.
 - Observe employee reactions – pay attention to employee nonverbal cues such as crossed arms, shoulder shrugging, lack of eye contact, and the tone of their voice. Staying aware of these actions will help you navigate when to ask clarifying questions and deepen the conversation.
 - Speak with Compassion. Regardless of how challenging a topic may be, remember you are on the same team, everyone makes mistakes, and nobody thrives on negative feedback. Approaching feedback with empathy can create a safe space for the discussion
 - Be aware of burn-out. The reality is usually very different from the stereotype of what working from home looks like. Many employees achieve more working from home and put in more hours in fear of being labeled as lazy. Increased Zoom meetings also leave less time for work, causing employees to put in more hours. Working from home can also blur the lines between home and work life causing employees to always stay connected (i.e. respond to emails)
 - Establish trust. Assume positive intent and begin with the belief that the employee can be successful and are producing their best possible work. Allow metrics and results to speak for the employee’s productivity
 - End on an upbeat note
 - Ending on a negative note may leave the employee feeling that their job is at stake which can lead to loss of productivity and struggle for support while working from home.
 - Ending on a positive note will boost employee self-esteem and enhance productivity.
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Continued Real-Time Feedback

- Feedback and follow-up should be frequent and consistent occurrences during one-on-one meetings.
- Feedback in career conversations should not be a surprise to the employees, but rather a review of all the items you have discussed during the year.
- Remote employees can feel disconnected from the business and the team. Holding regular check-ins will make them feel valued and recognized.
- Devote time during regular check-ins to discuss personal goals, training opportunities, and career development goals set during the career conversation. Remember to revisit the completed Career Conversations document frequently.

