

Performance Coaching Conversation

Starter Guidance Sheet

Step 1: Employee Appreciation

- “I wanted to point out the great work you achieved on this project...”
- “Your work impacted the university/college/department by...”
- “I wanted to share the great teamwork you showed when...”
- “I wanted to thank you for your input on...”
- “I noticed great initiative when you...”

Step 2: Constructive Coaching

- “I have some feedback that might be difficult to hear. Are you open to hearing these thoughts?”
- “Based on my own observations, you may be engaging in some behaviors that are getting in your way. Can we discuss this?”
- “I’m going to describe a problem I see. I may be wrong and, if so, I hope you’ll tell me. If I’m not, let’s discuss ways to address it.”
- “Next time you work on X project or with Y person, what might you keep in mind? Is there anything you might approach differently? How can I help?”
- “What could have gone better?”

Step 3: Institutional Culture and Values

- “APSU’s values are (list them), which value does your work exemplify best right now? Which value do you feel you could improve on? Are there values that we as a team could improve on or contribute to?”
- “What are your favorite aspects of our department/group/team?”
- “What might you change and why?”
- “How can I support you in X project? In your long-term goals?”
- “What are some things you’d like to see more of from me?”
- “Are there any new ways you would like to serve the university/college/department (committees, projects, etc.)”

Step 4: Learning and Development

- “What are three things you have learned this semester?”
- “Do you have the chance to work on projects that use your skills and expertise in the best way? Are there projects or areas you’d like to work on if you had the chance?”
- “Given the opportunity, which skills and/or competencies would you most like to develop?”
- “What are your key priorities as you think about your career? How does that connect to your current work?”

- “Are there things you’d like to accomplish that you don’t yet feel prepared to do? If so, what’s the nature of the ‘gap?’”

Step 5: Listening and Employee Feedback (Six Active Listening Techniques)

1. Pay Attention

One goal of active listening and being an effective listener is to set a comfortable tone that gives your employees an opportunity to think and speak. Allow “wait time” before responding. Don’t cut employees off, finish their sentences, or start formulating your answer before they’ve finished. Pay attention to your body language as well as your frame of mind when engaging in active listening. Be focused on the moment, make eye contact, and operate from a place of respect as the listener.

2. Withhold Judgment

Active listening requires an open mind. As a listener and a leader, be open to new ideas, new perspectives, and new possibilities when practicing active listening. Even when good listeners have strong views, they suspend judgment, hold any criticisms, and avoid interruptions like arguing or selling their point right away.

3. Reflect

When you’re the listener, don’t assume that you understand your employee correctly — or that they know you’ve heard them. Mirror your employee’s information and emotions by periodically paraphrasing key points. Reflecting is an active listening technique that indicates that you and your counterpart are on the same page. For example, your employee might tell you, *“Emma is so loyal and supportive of her people — they’d walk through fire for her. But no matter how much I push, her team keeps missing deadlines.”*

To paraphrase, you could say, *“So Emma’s people skills are great, but accountability is a problem.”*

If you hear, *“I don’t know what else to do!”* or *“I’m tired of bailing the team out at the last minute,”* try helping your employee label their feelings: *“Sounds like you’re feeling pretty frustrated and stuck.”*

4. Clarify

Don’t be shy to ask questions about any issue that’s ambiguous or unclear when engaging in active listening. As the listener, if you have doubt or confusion about what your employee has said, say something like, *“Let me see if I’m clear. Are you talking about ...?”* or *“Wait a minute. I didn’t follow you.”*

Open-ended, clarifying, and probing questions are important active listening tools that encourage the employee to do the work of self-reflection and problem solving, rather than justifying or defending a position, or trying to guess the “right answer.”

Examples include: *“What do you think about ...?”* or *“Tell me about ...?”* and *“Will you further explain/describe ...?”*

When engaging in active listening, the emphasis is on asking, rather than telling. It invites a thoughtful response and maintains a spirit of collaboration.

You might say: *“What are some of the specific things you’ve tried?”* or *“Have you asked the team what their main concerns are?”* or *“Does Emma agree that there are performance problems?”* and *“How certain are you that you have the full picture of what’s going on?”*

5. Summarize

Restating key themes as the conversation proceeds confirms and solidifies your grasp of the other person’s point of view. It also helps both parties to be clear on mutual responsibilities and follow-up. Briefly summarize what you’ve understood while practicing active listening, and ask the other person to do the same.

Giving a brief restatement of core themes raised by the employee might sound like: *“Let me summarize to check my understanding. Emma was promoted to manager, and her team loves her. But you don’t believe she holds them accountable, so mistakes are accepted and keep happening. You’ve tried everything you can think of, and there’s no apparent impact. Did I get that right?”*

Restating key themes helps increase accountability.

6. Share

Active listening is *first* about understanding the other person, *then* about being understood as the listener. As you gain a clearer understanding of the other person’s perspective, you can begin to introduce your own ideas, feelings, and suggestions. You might talk about a similar experience you had, or share an idea that was triggered by a comment made previously in the conversation.

Once the situation has been talked through in this way, both you and your employee have a good picture of where things stand. From this point, the conversation can shift into problem-solving: *What hasn’t been tried? What don’t we know? What new approaches could be taken?*

As the coach, continue to query, guide, and offer, but don’t dictate a solution. Your employee will feel more confident and eager if they think through the options and own the solution.

Used in combination, these six (6) active listening techniques are the keys in holding a coaching conversation.

APSU Values

- Academic Excellence
- Integrity
- Community
- Personal Growth
- Life-Long Engagement
- Collaboration

Strengths Examples

This table lists some of the types of strengths that might be noted in a performance conversation. We encourage employees and supervisors to be creative when considering strengths.





Accuracy	Produces work products that are correct, factual, and free of errors.
Analysis	Is able to make sense of information to support projects and planning.
Communication	Is able to convey information effectively through writing, presentations, or speaking.
Compassion	Demonstrates an understanding of another person's situation and the desire to alleviate concern or distress.
Coaching/developing others	Supports the success of others by sharing knowledge and advice and connecting them to supportive resources.
Courage	Faces difficulty, adversity, risk or danger with confidence.
Creativity	Uses imagination or artistic abilities to develop original content or ideas.
Decision-making	Gathers necessary information, weighs alternatives, and engages with others when appropriate before and after committing to a course of action.
Environmental scanning	Constantly monitors the internal and external environment to identify trends, opportunities, and threats to the institution.
Flexibility	Is able and willing to shift activities, priorities, and approaches based on new demands.
Initiative	Proactively takes steps to make the organization stronger by providing ideas, developing solutions, and offering suggestions for improvement

Integrity	Honors commitments; maintains confidences; follows laws, policies and procedures; considers the needs of others; and does not take unfair advantage of opportunities.
Interpersonal communication	Listens well, demonstrates empathy for the other person's perspective or situation, and is able to establish common ground in order to resolve tension or conflict.
Planning and Organizing	Prioritizes work, manages resources and information effectively, and uses time wisely to accomplish tasks and goals.
Problem solving	Identifies and defines problems, considers multiple solutions, and makes considered judgments about the best approach forward.
Relationship building	Is able to forge mutually beneficial partnerships with others.
Researching	Systematically inquires or investigates in order to discover new knowledge or revise facts or theories.
Results orientation	Sets or accepts ambitious goals and consistently moves work and projects forward to completion.
Strategic	Uses data, ideas, relationships, and resources to achieve goals.
Teaching	Effectively conveys information in order to help others learn or understand information and concepts.
Team work	Works effectively in a team setting. Listens well, considers diverse opinions, and contributes fully to the team's success.
Tenacity	Demonstrates determination and persistence.

**The Twelve (12) Elements of Great Managing:
The Employee Engagement Hierarchy**

Gallup’s research shows that the order in which these 12 employee engagement items are asked is important. When discussing these elements with their teams, managers should focus first on employees’ basic needs, then align their employees’ and teams’ efforts with the company’s mission, cultures, and brand. This alignment helps companies maximize employee engagement as a key driver of business performance and success.

Use this conversation as an opportunity to touch on the 12 elements of employment engagement.

	<p>Q12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow. Step 4</p> <p>Q11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress. Step 1, 2</p>
	<p>Q10. I have a best friend at work. Step 1, 3</p> <p>Q09. My associated or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work. Step 3.</p> <p>Q08. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important. Step 2, 3</p> <p>Q07. At work, my opinions seem t count. Step 3,5</p>
	<p>Q6. There is someone at work who encourages my development. Step 2, 4</p> <p>Q5. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person. Step 1, 5</p> <p>Q4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work. Step 1</p> <p>Q3. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day. Step 2, 3</p>
	<p>Q2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right. Step 2, 4</p> <p>Q1. I know what is expected of me at work. Step 2</p>

If you are interested in more information on Gallup’s Employee Engagement Survey, you may find it at <https://www.gallup.com/q12/>.