Manager as Coach: Conversation Guide

A practical toolkit for strengths-based conversations that build trust, accountability, and performance.

Purpose of This Guide

The *Manager as Coach Conversation Guide* is designed to help you hold intentional, strengths-based conversations that build trust, clarify expectations, and enhance performance.
Each section provides practical questions, reflection prompts, and note-taking space to support meaningful dialogue and development.

This guide encourages managers to shift from *telling and evaluating* to *asking and developing*—helping employees discover their own insights, build accountability, and thrive in their roles.

Using This Guide

These conversation guides are not scripts—they're frameworks to help you engage with curiosity and authenticity. Choose the questions that fit the situation and your employee's needs. Allow the conversation to flow naturally, focusing on listening more than directing.

Each conversation guide includes:

- **Purpose and Use:** When and why to use the conversation
- **Sample Questions:** Select those that best fit your situation
- **Post-Conversation Reflection:** Capture key insights and next steps

Encourage ongoing dialogue by scheduling regular follow-ups and referencing your notes over time.

Tips for Effective Coaching Conversations

- **Be curious.** Use open-ended questions to help employees think, reflect, and explore.
- **Listen actively.** Focus on understanding before responding.
- **Connect to strengths.** Help employees recognize and apply their DiSC® Style & CliftonStrengths® Themes.
- **Clarify expectations.** Make sure both you and the employee are clear about goals and responsibilities.
- **Celebrate progress.** Recognize wins and growth moments—large and small.
- **Build trust.** Keep commitments, show genuine interest, and maintain confidentiality.

Before the Conversation:

- Review your employee's DiSC® and CliftonStrengths® results.
- Identify one or two key outcomes you hope to achieve.
- Choose questions that align with your employee's current goals or challenges.

Conversation Flow (Suggested Sequence)

While each conversation can stand alone, they work best as a progression throughout the employee relationship:

Stage	Conversation Focus	Purpose
1	Roles and Relationship	Build understanding and trust
2	Establishing Expectations	Clarify roles, goals and mutual expectations
3	Performance	Provide feedback, set goals and identify barriers
4	Accountability	Review progress and reinforce commitment
5	Development	Explore growth opportunities and learning goals
6	Motivation and Recognition	Understand what inspires and sustains engagement
7	Conflict	Strengthen collaboration and resolve challenges

Use this guide to spark insight, deepen connection, and help every team member do what they do best every day.

"Coaching is a conversation that transforms insight into action."
— Inspired Engagement

Manager as Coach: Roles and Relationships

In this conversation, the manager is getting to know the employee as an individual. Together, you explore what energizes and motivates the employee, what talents and skills they possess, and the employee's self-perceptions.

Use this conversation when you are:	**My Goals for this Conversation:**
• **Getting acquainted** with an employee new to you. • **Building trust** with an employee. • **Identifying differences** between employees to avoid conflicts.	

Conversation with: _____ Date: _____

Employee's DiSC® Style or CliftonStrengths® Themes: _____

☐ What about your work energizes you? How often do you get to do that?
☐ What aspects of your work do you think you do well?
☐ What are the things you do well that you wish you could do more often each day?
☐ When are you at your best?
☐ What gets in the way of you being at your best every day?

☐ What do you like most about being part of this department or organization?
☐ What do you like least about being part of this department or organization?
☐ What parts of your role that you find difficult? What could I do to help make it easier?
☐ Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

Post-Conversation Notes/Reflection:

- ✓ How clear is this employee about his or her strengths?
- ✓ How has this employee utilized their CliftonStrengths® Themes or DiSC® Style in their role?
- ✓ In what ways can you help this employee discover, develop, and apply their natural talents/strengths in his or her current role?

Manager as Coach: Establishing Expectations

In this conversation, the manager and the employee set clear expectations for each other.

Use this conversation:	**My Goals for this Conversation:**
• **Initial onboarding** as a new manager or with a new employee. • **Setting clear expectations** during individual meetings. • **Discovering** what the employee expects of the manager.	

Conversation with: _____ Date: _____

Employee's DiSC® Style or CliftonStrengths® Themes: _____

☐ What do you believe you get paid to do?
☐ What do you think I expect of you?
☐ What do you expect of me?
☐ How would you prefer to receive feedback about these expectations?
☐ How do you apply your CliftonStrengths® or DiSC® Style to help you be successful at work?

☐ Do you have the materials and equipment you need to do your work right? If not, what do you need?
☐ What do you contribute to your co-workers, this department, and the organization?
☐ How can I help you be even more successful at work?

Post-Conversation Notes/Reflection:

- ✓ How does this employee's understanding of what is expected of them compare with what you expect?
- ✓ Are the employee's expectations of you clear and realistic?
- ✓ Think of ways to help this employee measure the outcomes of these expectations.

Manager as Coach: Performance

In this conversation, the manager guides the employee toward success in either a new or challenging situation or improving their work performance.

Use this conversation when you are:	**My Goals for this Conversation:**
• **Reviewing** performance goals. • **Providing** individual performance feedback. • **Improving** performance.	

Conversation with: _____ Date: _____

Employee's DiSC® Style or CliftonStrengths® Themes: _____

Specific Performance Goal: _____

☐ How do you define this performance goal? How do you measure the progress and success of this goal?
☐ What is the impact on you and/or the organization if you do not meet this performance goal?
☐ What progress have you made toward this goal? In what ways do you feel you have excelled in your pursuit?
☐ How much of the time you spend on this goal do you feel you can do what you do best? How could that percentage of time be increased?
☐ What are some of the barriers to meeting this performance goal?
☐ In what ways are you best using your DiSC® Style to meet this performance goal?

☐ Are there any skills or knowledge that would help you meet this goal? Is there anyone with these skills and knowledge that you could partner with?
☐ How can I help you meet this goal?
☐ What needs to happen for you to meet this goal?
☐ What will you do differently now to ensure you meet this goal?
☐ When should we meet to discuss your progress again? How should we measure you progress?

Post-Conversation Notes/Reflection:

- ✓ How can you link this employee's talents to the performance goal?
- ✓ How can you help this employee navigate and mitigate the barriers to their performance?
- ✓ How do/could you define this employee's progress through clear measurements?

Manager as Coach: Situational Feedback

These sample questions can clarify a specific situation, expectation, or outcome you follow up on OR when an employee comes to you for feedback and coaching.

- What is happening (what, who, when, and how often)?
- What is the effect or result of this?
- On a scale of one to 10, how severe/serious/urgent is the situation?
- What steps have you already taken towards this goal?
- How would you describe what you did?
- On a scale of one to 10, where are you in relation to the goal?
- What has contributed to your success so far?
- What progress have you made so far?
- What is working well right now?
- What do you feel is required of you?
- Why do you believe you haven't reached that goal already or made the progress you expected to make?
- What do you think is stopping you?
- What do you think is really happening?
- Do you know other people who have achieved a similar goal?
- What could you learn from them?
- What strategies have you already tried?
- If you asked ____, what would they say about you?

Once you both have a clear and shared understanding of the situation the following sample questions are designed to help the employee explore options and generate solutions:

- What are your options?
- What do you think you need to do next?
- What could be your first or next step?
- What must you do to get a better result (or closer to your goal)?
    - What else could you do?
- Who might be able to help?
- What would happen if you did nothing?
- What has worked for you already? How could you do more of that?
    - What would happen if you did that?
- What is the hardest/most challenging part of that for you?
    - What advice would you give to a friend about that?
    - What would you gain/lose by doing/saying that?

  - If someone did/said that to you, what do you think would happen?
  - What's the best/worst thing about that option?
- Which option do you feel ready to act on?
- How have you approached a similar situation before?
  - What could you do differently this time?
- If anything was possible, what would you do?
  - What else?

These sample questions are designed to help the employee establish a clear action plan for the next steps and probe for and achieve commitment:

- What do you think you need to do right now?
- Tell me how you're going to do that. How are you going to go about it?
- Is there anything else you can do?
- On a scale of one to 10, what is the likelihood of your plan succeeding?
  - What would it take to make it a 10?
- What obstacles are getting in the way of success?
  - Do they require planning?
- What resources can help you?
- What support do you need to get that done?
- What do you need from me/others to help you achieve this?
- What is one small step you will take right now?
- When are you going to start?
- How will you know you have been successful?
- What will happen (or what is the cost) if you do NOT do this?
- What are three actions you can take that would make sense this week?
- On a scale of one to 10, how committed/motivated are you to doing it?
  - What would it take to make it a 10?

Manager as Coach: Accountability

In this conversation, the manager and the employee review the employee's progress.

Use this conversation:	**My Goals for this Conversation:**
• **Discuss** employee progress and development. • **Celebrate** and understand successes. • **Support** employee development and growth.	

Conversation with: _____ Date: _____

Employee's DiSC® Style or CliftonStrengths® Themes: _____

☐ What does accountability mean to you?
☐ How do you motivate yourself to complete tasks?
☐ What was your biggest personal highlight in the last week?
☐ What was your biggest priority last week?
☐ Did you accomplish it, and if not, why not?
☐ What was your biggest obstacle?

☐ What do you need to solve it?
☐ What needs to happen to make this week a success?
☐ What do you need help with and from who?

Post-Conversation Notes/Reflection:

- ✓ How can you help this employee be accountable to their expected outcomes?

Manager as Coach: Employee Development

In this conversation, the manager and the employee explore the employee's personal and professional development goals.

Use this conversation when you are:	**My Goals for this Conversation:**
• **Discovering** professional development opportunities. • **Preparing** employees for advancement within the team or the college. • **Developing** leadership within teams.	

Conversation with: _____ Date: _____

Employee's DiSC® Style or CliftonStrengths® Themes: _____

☐ How do you feel about what you are currently working on?
☐ What do you do better than you did last week or last month or last year?
☐ Are there new things you would like to try in your role?
☐ What challenging experiences are you facing at work? What other challenges would you like to take on?
☐ If you could learn anything that would help you in your current role, what would it be?

☐ Is there someone you would you like to learn from and what would you like to learn from him or her?
☐ What would have to happen for you to be able to look back and say, "This was the best company I was ever a part of"?

Post-Conversation Notes/Reflection:

- ✓ How can you help this employee create opportunities to learn and develop?
- ✓ How do/could you define this employee's progress through clear measurements?
- ✓ How can you help this employee feel continually successful without experiencing a promotion?

Manager as Coach: Motivation and Recognition

In this conversation, the manager and the employee are exploring the employee's motivation and preferred recognition.

Use this conversation when you are: • **Building** or maintaining motivation. • **Exploring** forms of recognition.	**My Goals for this Conversation:**

Conversation with: _____ Date: _____

Employee's DiSC® Style or CliftonStrengths® Themes: _____

☐ What about your work satisfies you the most?
☐ What about your work motivates you the most?
☐ Tell me about the best recognition you have ever received. Why was it the best?
☐ What type of recognition is most motivating for you?
☐ How do you recognize your coworkers for doing a good job?

Post-Conversation Notes/Reflection:

- ✓ How can you link this employee's motivators and satisfiers to recognition?
- ✓ Listen for the types of recognition that would be most meaningful to this person. Consider the timing and how (e.g., public vs. private) this person prefers to receive recognition.
- ✓ What steps can you take to ensure that this employee receives recognition that honors their individualized needs and expresses appreciation for their unique talents?

Manager as Coach: Conflict

In this conversation, the manager and the employee explore ways to manage conflict. Be specific about the conflict.

Use this conversation when you are:	**My Goals for this Conversation:**
• **Helping** the employee manage specific conflict situations.	

Conversation with: _____ Date: _____

Employee's DiSC® Style or CliftonStrengths® Themes: _____

☐ How do you describe the conflict you are experiencing? What is the issue?
☐ What are your interests? What do you really want, need, or fear from resolving this conflict? For yourself? For others? For the organization?
☐ What are the facts related to this conflict?
☐ How could knowing the CliftonStrengths® themes or the DiSC® Style of everyone involved help understand the other interests or points of view?
☐ How could you create a win-win solution?
☐ How can I help you manage this conflict?

☐ What needs to happen next for you to best manage this conflict?
☐ What will you do differently now to ensure you manage this conflict?
☐ When should we meet to discuss your progress again? How should we measure your progress?

Post-Conversation Notes/Reflection:

- ✓ How can you help this employee recognize the role of their talents in the conflict?
- ✓ How can this employee's talents help manage their conflict?
- ✓ How can you help this employee navigate and mitigate the barriers to their management of the conflict?