

4 Important Leadership Conversations

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The leader who communicates well succeeds well.



Building successful relationships grow in importance at every step of your career, it is particularly critical when going through a transformation, and in stepping into your change agent shoes and helping to build a leadership culture.

It is important to invest time in conversations with team members, your leaders, peers, and other stakeholders. 21st C success demands greater connection, alignment, and collaboration with others. Every exchange is a touchpoint, an opportunity to learn, share, encourage creativity, build trust and truly honest dialogue.

In their book, *Leadership Conversations*, Alan S. Berson and Richard G. Stieglitz describe four important types of

leadership conversations; those that build relationships, develop others, help in decision making and lead to execution.

1. “Conversations to build relationships”

The more relationships – and relationship conversations – you have, the more you’ll know whom to trust for the right perspectives on problems or opportunities.

You’ll also learn how to complement your strengths with others’ abilities. As you talk, ask questions, seek common understandings and listen carefully. Don’t use texts or emails to deal with challenging or difficult problems. The phone is better, and face-to-face conversations are the best. Be respectful and seek to engage and inspire others as you build relationships.

Remember that people look to you constantly. Avoid bringing negative moods to work, since your silence and your body language also send messages. Keep your mind open to different and opposing views. Value diverse views, especially from those closest to you. Do not react to what is being said to you, pause and respond; yes, you can train yourself to pause and to refocus on your objective and the mutual objective of your conversation. I call this skill, constructive discontent-a critical EQ & 3Q leadership skill.

2. “Conversations to develop others” – As you progress up the leadership ladder, increase your investment in developing other people. To succeed as a leader, you must have followers. Invest in them,

develop them, recognize them and gain their loyalty.

To be promotable, you need successors. Bring them along with coaching, allow them to do what they do best as often as possible and give them the tools they need.

Provide formal and informal feedback regularly. Be open and direct. Learn how to give thoughtful, constructive criticism in a way that transforms what you are saying into a growth opportunity.

Ask for feedback, open the door for your team members to let you know if there is something you can do to support their work.

Consistently recognize big and small achievements. Even putting a post-it note on a screen saying, "Good Job" has been known to have an important effect. Positive feedback makes our body secrete the happy hormone, dopamine which also helps us remember the positive incident.

Craft all of your feedback to help recipients achieve their goals.

Finding mentors who will coach team members can be a robust success tool.

3. "Conversations to make decisions" – You will rarely have enough time and information or the right conditions to make decisions in an ideal context. Leaders make better decisions when they can draw on multiple perspectives and gain as much data as possible to aid their judgment.

Set up talks to gather data, determine your options and gain broad buy-in for decisions.

Remain open to building consensus around a compromise. Instead

of concentrating on problems, set a conversation's tone by asking probing questions that open possibilities and empower everyone in the group.

4. "Conversations to take action" – Prior discussions create optimal conditions for action, but action requires additional dialogues. Use conversations to plan your actions. In the process, you'll develop ideas and build concurrence.

"Managers usually answer questions, great leaders routinely ask them." Alan S. Berson and Richard G. Stieglitz

Circumstances will likely alter your plans, so prepare your team for change. Don't act based on assumptions. Ask questions, gather data, and craft your plans and actions accordingly. Make requests of people; don't give them orders. Soon after you act, use an "after-action review" – invented by the US Army – to talk with your team about what worked, what didn't and how to improve.

"Employ the management mindset to make decisions based on numbers and facts...use the leadership mindset to consider the people who will participate in making and executing the decisions." Alan S. Berson and Richard G. Stieglitz

Conversations take time and perseverance yet avoiding them leads to mistakes that consume additional time and money to fix. Instead, use idea sharing and consensus building to align your team's mission and your team members' understanding of and commitment to the group's objectives.

Remain aware that personal engagement takes place at an emotional level based on relationships. The chain of

conversations starts with those relationships and leads to collaboration, shared ideas, better decisions, and more effective action.

Leadership Skills: Relationship Building Matrix

Who	Type of Leadership Conversation	When & Where	Notes/Results

What type of leadership conversation would you like to improve, and what will be the likely results of this improvement? Communication is a learned skill and mastering the art of the aforementioned leadership conversations is an investment in your success.



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