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For health care leaders and managers

# Conversation guide for ongoing employee evaluation

A tool for managers and team leaders

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### GOAL

Reflect on facets of your own and your employees' identities which may impact their ongoing performance and career development, on a regular basis.

### INTENDED USERS

Managers with direct reports

### TIME REQUIRED

30 minutes to prepare, 5 minutes to deliver message to team

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### HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

Managers can use this tool to account for effects of identity when guiding employees through quarterly performance conversations. Beyond evaluation, this document can also be used to guide regular conversations about goals and career path development. This tool is designed to initiate effective conversations around the employee's strengths, areas of improvement, and plans to meet career objectives while considering how identity and values can affect feedback.

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# Focus area: Strengths

## Objective

Discuss the employee's strengths. Allow the employee to guide the conversation by asking for their take first before offering your opinion.

## Why it matters

Organizations that use a strengths-based development approach realize an 18% improvement in productivity and a 72% decrease in turnover.

A 2020 KPMG survey reports that 75% of executive women in the United States have experienced imposter syndrome, and that 81% believe they put more pressure on themselves not to fail than men.

## What to listen for

Does this team member struggle to name their strengths?  
Do they feel underappreciated for their contributions?

Our backgrounds and identities can impact how comfortable we are sharing our strengths—and whether we get credit for our work.

## Spotlight employee strengths with these prompts:

- What achievements are you most proud of since the last time we spoke?  
*Highlight at least one specific action the staff member has taken since the last time you spoke that has positively impacted the team's performance.*
- What strengths do you see contributing to your success?  
*If the employee struggles to name strengths, share your perspective on their strengths. Or ask questions: What's something in your role that seems to come naturally to you? What do you find most energizing?*
- How can I and the team leverage your strengths more than we are today?
- When, if at all, do you feel undermined or undervalued for your contributions to the team? How can I help?
- Do you feel recognized for your contributions in a way that is meaningful to you? How would you like to be recognized?

# Focus area: Areas for improvement

## Objective

Discuss areas where the employee can improve, but consider how your own biases might influence what you see as their opportunities.

## Why it matters

Studies show that 4 out of 10 employees are actively disengaged when they receive little to no feedback and that 82% of employees appreciate both positive and negative feedback.

However, professionals of color receive less feedback and guidance than their white colleagues, and women get less actionable feedback than men. While worrying about being perceived as racist or sexist, managers can default to “protective hesitation” rather than honest feedback.

## What to listen for

Does this employee feel a lack of constructive criticism?

Actionable and objective feedback demonstrates care for employees’ personal growth while calling out areas for improvement.

## Identify challenges faced by employees using these prompts:

- What is one area in which you would like to improve?
  - Share your observation on their areas for improvement. Make sure your feedback is actionable with clear steps tied to performance. If you're unsure, ask yourself: Would my feedback or perception of their performance change if this person had a different identity?*
- How can I be more supportive as you work to improve in that area? Is there anything that is unclear about your development objectives?
- We’re all prone to bias and see the world through our own lens shaped by our background and value systems. Do you think that is a fair assessment, or might there be something that I’m missing or not seeing clearly? You can reflect on this and come back to me.
- What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them? Nothing is too big or small to share.
  - Was there anything that I or team members did that made these challenges harder? What should we do differently next time?
  - Is there anything that I or anyone else on the team has communicated explicitly or implicitly that made you feel that you could not be successful here?

Source: Lyons R., “Feedback — you need to lead it,” Forbes, July 2017; Roberts LM and Washington Z., “Women of color get less support at work. Here’s how managers can change that,” Harvard Business Review, March 2019.

# Focus area: Professional aspirations

## Objective

Discuss employees' long-term goals for their career, where they want to go next in the organization, and potentially hidden challenges that might prevent them from getting there.

## Why it matters

Seventy-four percent of employees feel they are not reaching their full potential due to a lack of professional development opportunities.

A 2019 McKinsey report found that Black women and women with disabilities face more barriers to advancement and get less support from their managers, resulting in an unequal chance of growing professionally.

## What to listen for

Does this team member feel a lack of support? Are they aware of the possibilities for their future career?

An employee's identity directly impacts their long-term goals and likelihood of staying at their position. Managers can help mitigate these trends by making sure all employees feel supported in their long-term career path at their organization.

## Learn how to advocate for your employees' professional growth using these prompts:

- What do you see yourself achieving in your future career?
- What next steps do you want to take to get there? How can I help?
- I want to acknowledge that our identity—both chosen and inherent aspects—can have an impact on our career trajectory depending on the culture of an organization. Are there any specific challenges you see in front of you that you'd like to name that I may not be aware of? Feel free to reflect on this and get back to me.
- Are you able to achieve a satisfactory work-life balance? If not, what is missing?
- What's one thing that I can do differently as a leader to ensure you feel this is a place where you can thrive professionally?



## Research team

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