



University
of Basel

Performance conversations

T&D toolbox: Conversations
between team leaders and
team members





Performance conversations

Instructions for use

Further information > www.unibas.ch/td



Prepare

- What about the team member's behavior or performance is objectionable?
 - Explain concisely and clearly what exactly needs to be changed or improved.
 - Describe the kind of behavior or result you want the team member to achieve in a fair and transparent way.
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Have an open conversation

- Present your observations and objections respectfully.
 - Be fair, transparent, and concise in your description.
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Listen

- Allow the team member to illustrate his or her point of view.
 - Listen attentively to what the team member has to say.
 - If necessary, redirect the team member back to the issue at hand.
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Invite the team member to find a solution

- Give the team member a chance to save face and make good on their performance or behavior.
 - Allowing the team member to find a workable solution improves the chances for sustained implementation of the change.
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Follow up if necessary

- Are any further steps necessary? Does the team member need support to implement the changes?
 - Who is responsible for which of the changes agreed on?
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Document the conversation

- Document the results so that the team leader and team member can refer back to them.
- Keywords and notes suffice.
- Should you want to make more extensive documentation, use the form in chapter 11 of the PDF provided on this website.
- Extensive documentation (with the PDF provided on this website) is stored in central HR's electronic personnel folder.
- In case of labor disputes between the University of Basel and the team member or team leader, all parties and Legal Services may refer to the centrally stored documentation.



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Performance conversations: Brief introduction

To request a performance conversation with a team member is necessary if a team member's performance or behavior is not up to standard or is an obstacle to a unit's successfully achieving its objectives. The conversation should be held in an open atmosphere; objections should be presented in a fair, transparent, and respectful manner. Whenever team leaders find fault with a team member's performance or behavior, they should address this timely and directly with the person involved on equal footing. The team leader should give an example of the objectionable behavior or performance that he or she has observed firsthand and point out what is required to improve the results and collaborative environment.

During the discussion, the team member can then make suggestions on how to change and improve their performance. This gives the team member the chance to save face and suggest a workable plan of action and also increases the chance that the proposed changes will be implemented long-term.

Make sure to refer to the information about constructive dialogue on this website. The detailed information is intended to support you in preparing, holding, and documenting a performance conversation.

The main objective is to find sustainable, constructive solutions in a conflict. At the end of the conversation, the documentation detailing the subsequent course of action and desired standard of performance is signed by both the team leader and the team member.

Performance conversations: Occasion and significance

If a team member's poor performance or behavior jeopardizes the unit's success, then it is necessary for the team leader to request a performance conversation.

Requesting a performance conversation with a team member is appropriate when he or she regularly does not meet the set standards and objectives. Whenever a team or unit's success is in jeopardy or coworkers or clients are irritated by a team member's behavior and previous suggestions to improve have not been followed, then there is a conflict that needs to be addressed timely and resolved constructively.

Requesting a performance conversation with a team member complements the following discussions:

- regular discussions of roles, responsibilities, standards, and procedures to meet agreed-upon objectives;
- frequent acknowledgment of a job well-done;
- suggestions on how to improve a team member's performance and behavior;
- periodic in-depth evaluations and planning discussions. > [Staff Review with agreement on objectives](#)

How to proceed in these conversations

At the basis of a performance conversation is—as in every conversation a team leader holds with a team member—an attitude of ethical, constructive leadership and transparent, respectful communication. In these conversations, the team leader appreciates the team member's contribution and controls the positive outcome of their performance by both making demands AND supporting the team member. > [Constructive dialogue](#)



Calling for improvement and change

Requesting a performance conversation, in which the team leader emphatically asks a team member to change their behavior or performance, is appropriate when the team member has repeatedly ignored agreements and objectives from their staff review or feedbacks and suggestions by the team leader (e.g., a team member has poorly performed or sets doubtful priorities in their schedule or refuses to find information proactively). > **Criticism**

Chance to improve

When faced with their team leader's objections, a team member may provide their own point of view on the issue at hand. They get the chance to improve their poor performance by making suggestions and plans of action to improve their performance or attitude. Setting out their own course of action increases the chances that changes will be implemented long-term.

Role of the team leader

Team leaders do not need to provide the team member with quick solutions; they should instead rely on the team member's competence to solve problems and face challenges. If need be, team leaders can always offer support and empower the team member. Rather than making a team member feel incompetent, team leaders should emphasize the reasons and need for change.

Focus on solutions, not problems

If all the problems are not immediately solved after a conversation, there is no need to escalate the conflict further. It is better if the team leader and team member engage in a candid conversation on equal footing in which they can address and jointly tackle a problem and set out to resolve it. If there are further contentious issues, it is advisable to deal with them one by one rather than to escalate a conflict without any attempt at settling it.

Proceeding step by step

In extreme cases, after all other constructive efforts have failed, a formal warning may be issued. The team leader cannot issue a formal warning on his or her own but needs to coordinate it with central HR and secure support from either HR Consulting or the head of the HR department.

Ultima Ratio

Firing someone entails a considerable loss of know-how and maybe even a loss of financial resources for the University of Basel. It is better to try to find timely solutions to conflicts so that expertise and brain power can be retained. Team leaders can ask for support or one-on-one coaching with the Training and Development coaches. Nevertheless, there are situations when someone needs to be let go. Contact central HR to proceed in line with the University of Basel's regulations and Swiss Labor Laws and to prevent costly (in money and reputation) lawsuits.



Detailed form

to prepare a performance conversation

- 1. What is your hierarchial relation to the team member? What are the team member's roles and responsibilites?**

Visualize the hierarchy and constellation of the team member within your team or unit:

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- 2. Describe as concisely as possible an actual example of the team member's poor performance or objectionable attitude that you have observed firsthand. In what respect has the team member not met your expectations or jeopardized the team or unit's success?**

Concise message on team member's objectionable performance or attitude:



3. What is the critical issue? In what way does the team member need to improve their performance or adapt their behavior?

One critical issue with a maximum of two aspects the team member has to improve and one objective the team member has to fulfill:

4. What is the objective of the conversation, that is, how can you describe the desired result?

Define SMART objectives to solve the issue raised:

5. How much time do you think is needed for this first discussion?

Estimated time needed:



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- 6.** How (with what words) will you start the conversation? Note that an amicable beginning will help considerably in finding constructive solutions to the issues addressed.

Amicable opening such as brief praise for the team member's overall performance:

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- 7.** How (with what words) will you address the critical issue? Describe concisely what needs to be changed or done by the team member and why ("The team needs your performance in ... to be up to standard because ...").

Recent, firsthand example of the critical issue:

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- 8.** Let the team member comment on your objections and give their point of view. Do you need to consider the team member's personality? Is he or she particularly introverted or easily excited? Does he or she tend to blame others or give lengthy excuses?

Let the team member respond; if necessary, redirect them to the issue at hand:



9. How can you invite the team member to outline their plan of action for how to change/improve?

Your wording to invite the team member to find their own solution:

10. Are there any ideas or plans of action you can already agree on? Or does the proposed course of action need to be outlined more concretely? Will you discuss this course of action at a later date? How much time will you allow for drawing up the course of action? When will you meet for a follow-up conversation to document your agreement?

Do you need more time to outline the course of action, which will be agreed upon at a later date, namely:



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- 11.** What, in your opinion, should be the outcome of the meeting, and how will you conclude the conversation (for example, by setting a date for a follow-up conversation, by making a binding agreement, or by documenting the proposed plan of action)?

Come to an agreement, document, and conclude:

You don't have to, but you might want to document the results of these conversations in writing. In doing so, you should forward a copy to central HR, where it will be encoded and added to the digital personnel file.

A written and signed copy of your agreement may prove advantageous: both the team member and the team leader can refer back to it. Informing Training and Development and HR about performance conversations is also a good idea so as to prevent the further escalation of any potential conflict.

The better you keep T&D and HR updated, the swifter their response in supporting you with finding pragmatic and tenable solutions will be.