

A Four-Step Approach to Impactful Conversations With Team Members

Communication skills are essential for effective leadership. However, leaders who excel in communication are few and far between.

Research shows that [69% of managers](#) are uncomfortable communicating with employees and [91% of employees](#) say they feel their managers lack effective communication skills. Fortunately, communication is a skill that can be learned.

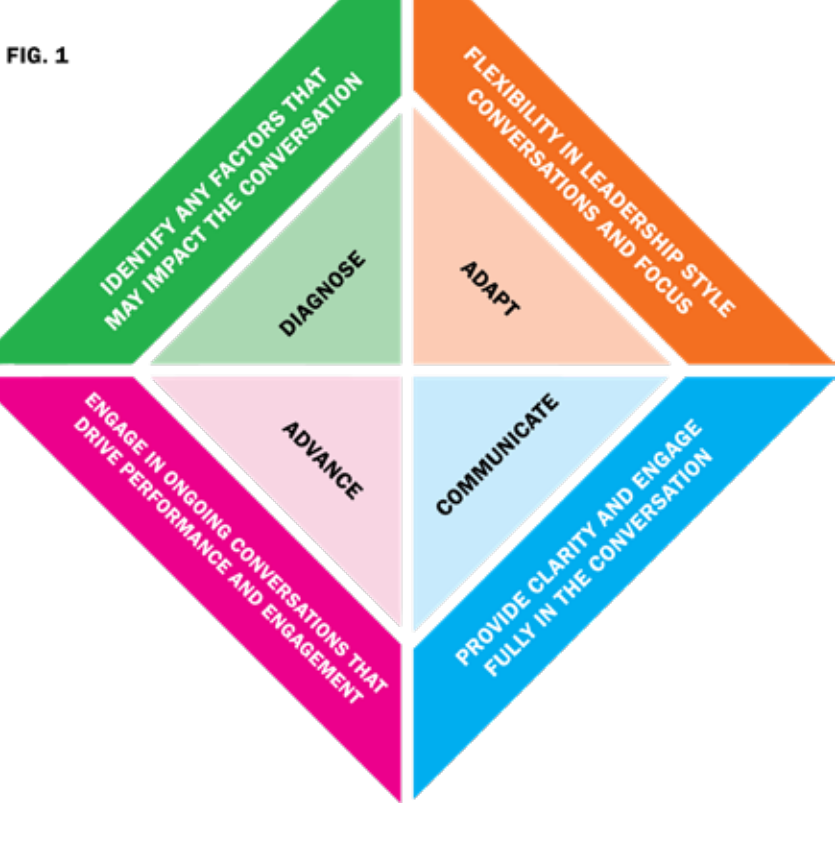
Using the Situational Conversations™ Framework can provide leaders with a four-step approach to have more impactful, everyday performance conversations that lead to sustained performance over time.



What Are Situational Conversations?

Situational conversations are the everyday conversations that leaders have with employees about their day-to-day tasks.

These ongoing conversations can help leaders avoid getting to the point of needing to have a difficult or high-stakes conversation.



A Four-Step Approach to Better Conversations With Team Members

This approach can help leaders have more effective performance conversations with team members.

Step 1: Diagnose

First, leaders need to diagnose the performance issue through a holistic lens. Start by considering if the task was completed to the expected standard.



Leaders must uncover any factors that may be hindering performance. Ask questions like:

- Are there any external factors impacting your ability to perform this task?
- Do you have enough support and resources to perform this task?
- Are there any additional challenges associated with this task that I may not be aware of?

Listen actively—the information you uncover during this step may impact the rest of the conversation.



Step 2: Adapt

Next, leaders need to adapt their approach to the conversation based on what they've learned during the diagnose step. They must also adapt their communication style based on the employee's reaction to the conversation.

Some common reactions to performance conversations include:

1. **The Defender:** The employee may begin defending their actions before you even finish addressing the situation.
2. **The Avoider:** The employee may put off discussions when they know they're performing poorly and will try to end the conversation quickly.
3. **The Processor:** The employee will allow you to address the situation fully but may not have a response in the moment and need time to reflect.
4. **The People Pleaser:** The employee is overly apologetic for any mistakes they have made. They may overpromise, attempting to compensate for any mistakes made.

Step 3: Communicate

This step is about clearly communicating with the appropriate leadership style, based on the observable behaviors and information shared. The leader must articulate their message to influence the individual in a positive way.



Here are a few tips for effective communication:

- Use objective language to avoid the employee feeling personally attacked
- Be specific about the performance issue or behavior and its impact on the team
- Offer suggestions for improvement and ask for the employee's input to help them feel heard

Remind the employee that you have a shared goal: You want to see them succeed, and they want to succeed. You might have different perspectives on how that happens, but you need to find common ground.



Step 4: Advance

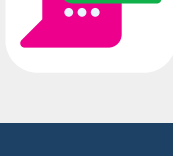
The last step is to advance performance through impactful and frequent conversations moving forward. One meaningful conversation isn't the key to unlocking sustained performance.

Here are some tips to continue advancing the conversation:

- Be proactive: Determine next steps and action items before ending the conversation
- Foster accountability: Make a plan to check in

Better Conversations—and Performance—Ahead

Having effective performance conversations with employees is challenging. Using a structured framework can help leaders, and their team members, have more impactful and productive conversations that elevate performance over time.



Situational conversations offer a proactive approach to managing performance and can help build trust between managers and employees.