

40 Phrases to Include in Any Performance Conversation

Performance reviews require preparation and careful consideration. Conversations should be free flowing, but they should also serve a purpose, and ultimately, they need to convey the proper message and extract the necessary information to make for a more productive and fruitful review. They can be delicate, so to help protect feelings and foster a safe environment where employees feel comfortable to express themselves, we've developed 40 starter phrases for managers.

To steer the conversation respectfully, you can start with these phrases and present them in a way that both gets to the core subject matter but also understands where obstacles inhibit performance — or identifies the springboard for success:

Exceeds Expectations

- They consistently produce high standards of quality
- They are an important contributing member of the team or department
- They exceed their performance goals regularly
- They always meet deadlines
- They are highly prepared and organized
- They learn quickly and share their knowledge with others
- They are committed to learning new skills and improving upon existing skills
- They accept new projects willingly and respond promptly to requests
- They think critically and creatively to solve problems
- Their suggestions are well researched and clearly communicated

Meets Expectations

- They recognize the needs of others and provide help when needed
- They have good working relationships and collaborate well
- They fit in well and promote company culture
- They effectively communicate their needs and expectations to their team and leaders

- They contribute to group discussions, meetings, and projects
- They complete their tasks in a timely manner
- They respond well to feedback and team input
- They share ideas with the team and strive to think creatively
- They require little guidance and take direction well

Needs Improvement

- They respond negatively when they receive in-the-moment coaching
- They ask for help first before trying to solve the problem themselves
- They don't ask for help when they're feeling overwhelmed
- They don't implement coaching or feedback
- They don't contribute in group discussion
- They are disorganized and consistently miss deadlines
- They are reticent to provide help when a team member is in need
- They respond negatively when given new projects or tasks to complete
- They consistently miss benchmarks and goals
- They have trouble managing their time, and tasks consistently get off track

Collaborative Conversation

- What is the most effective way to communicate feedback to you?
- What are some personal goals you want to achieve?
- What are some things that help you stay focused and organized to stay on track?
- Have there been times when you didn't get the coaching you needed?
- Are there any skills you want to improve or learn?
- What are the aspects of your job that motivate you?
- What are the aspects of your job where you struggle to find motivation?
- What are the aspects of your job that you find frustrating?
- Is there a resource you need that you don't have access to?
- What do you see for your future?