



“How to Conduct a Development Conversation”

A Coaching Model for Managers*

A development conversation is an *informal discussion* with an employee, colleague, or friend that provides an opportunity for the manager/coach to. . .

- Explore the coachee’s hopes and dreams
- Provide feedback
- Identify opportunities to learn, participate and lead
- Offer support and resources

Conducting a development conversation with an employee promotes their learning and growth and helps accelerate their career advancement. Here are the basic steps in conducting a development conversation.

1. Ask: “What are your hopes and dreams?”

Start by asking about their career aspirations. For instance, “Where would you’d like to be and what would you like to be doing five years from now?” Most importantly, ask: “Why does that energize you?” Help them understand what fuels their career ambition.

2. Uncover the real issues or obstacles.

Ask: “What stands between you and where you want to be? What issues or obstacles need to be addressed?” Use reflective listening (paraphrasing what you hear from them) to help them surface underlying concerns.

3. Explore options.

Ask: “What choices do you see?” What additional options can you offer that may fit with what they hope for in their careers. Choices encourage and empower people.

*This coaching model was developed by Don Mariska, the former Director of the ICMA Coaching Program.

4. Share stories and experiences.

Rather than telling people what to do, offer a story or an experience about what you've seen or experienced that may be relevant to them. Stories are the most powerful way to communicate a message or lesson. Sharing an experience helps people understand messages more deeply and integrate them into their own thinking.

5. Hold a big vision for them.

Sometimes people hold themselves back in their careers. They make too many assumptions about what they think they can and cannot achieve. Tell the person you are coaching what you want for them. Encourage them to take a big leap.

6. Invite action.

Most people need a nudge to take action. "I'd like to invite you to consider (whatever action seems appropriate)." You are not telling them what to do, but you are giving them something concrete to which they can react. Always leave the choice to them. Don't become attached to your own suggestions.

7. Build a "dream team."

Ask: "Who currently advises or otherwise supports you?" "Who else can help you realize your potential?" Suggest some other people who can help them achieve their hope and dream.

8. Ask if they would like a follow-up development conversation.

Most people need time to consider this initial conversation and the possible actions to take. Ask the person if they would like to get back together and share what they have considered as some initial steps or actions.