



15-Minute Career Conversation Guide

Manage a new generation of professionals

By Christine DiDonato

Advantage

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the 20-something employee asks...

“Hey, do you have a second?” the 20-something employee asks, not waiting for you to answer before launching into their next request.

“A blog post I read this morning says that I need a career coach. Will you be my career coach?” the millennial asks.

If you manage people between the ages of 20ish to 30ish, this may be a familiar scene. Today’s emerging professionals want career development—in addition to regular feedback and recognition.

Many members of this up-and-coming generation expect this career coaching to come from their managers. At the same time, for managers, the words “career coaching” may evoke images of long, drawn-out conversations with each employee that leave you with more to-do items and more pressure.

But, it doesn’t have to be that way. Career development doesn’t have to be part of a formal, time-consuming process that is solely a manager’s responsibility. Instead, the most effective career development involves powerful conversations—most of which can happen in 15 minutes or less. In this guide, we’ll show you how to have these conversations, what questions to ask and what difference it can make to you and your employees.

How 15 Minutes can Save You \$15,000 or More

Professional learning and development are the benefit millennials value most from their employers reports PwC. And the training or development opportunity they want most is working with strong coaches and mentors.

When emerging professionals receive the learning and development they crave, they become engaged with their organization and manager. Put simply, they work more, and the work they create is of a higher quality. Gallup reports that engaged millennials are also 26% less likely to consider taking a job with a different company and 64% less likely to say they will switch jobs. Keeping young professionals engaged and employed at your business can save you tens of thousands of dollars and the time it takes to recruit, hire and train a new employee.

So, why do only 21% of millennial employees feel managed in a way that motivates them to do outstanding work? We think it's because most managers haven't been trained to provide the type of guidance

young professionals crave. Career conversations are one of the most misunderstood management activities today. Too frequently, companies and managers connect career development to performance management, forms, checklists, and deadlines. With those expectations, career coaching can easily feel like an additional burden that's been added a manager's plate.

What's important to understand is that young professionals really want quality, not quantity when it comes to time with their manager. They want to discuss their career and goals in a focused, meaningful way. That's where the 15-minute career conversation comes into play.

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– Gallup 2017

Career Conversations Are About Questions, Not Answers

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Many managers avoid career development conversations because they are afraid of answering the questions an employee might ask. Questions such as “Can I get a raise?” or “When can I have that promotion?” may make managers feel like they must provide a clear, step-by-step path to satisfy the employee. No wonder they’re avoiding the conversation.

The trick is to reframe the discussion and start asking questions rather than answering them. These sessions shouldn’t create more work for you as a manager or take the accountability from the employee. You should be a guide, an accelerator—not a human career ladder.

Think about when Yoda trains Luke in the ways of the force. Yoda makes Luke do most of the work. Yoda provides guidance while Luke carries the Jedi master on his shoulders and trains in the Dagobah swamp.

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But, Yoda doesn’t do the running.

To be the coach that your millennial employees want, think like Yoda. You are a coach and a source of support. Your job is to listen, remove barriers to this person’s success and point out opportunities. You’re not a fortune teller or the source of all knowledge. You are also not responsible for employees taking the necessary actions to achieve their goals—they are.

With this mindset, you can shift the accountability for career development back to the employee while still providing the support he or she wants.

How to Have a 15-Minute Career Conversation

The 15-minute career conversation requires that you focus 100% on the employee. Your goal is to help this person understand who they are and what they really want from their career. At the same time, you will gain insight into what next steps make sense for this individual and how you can support them.

BEFORE:

Set aside a time when you can focus on the employee. Pick 15 minutes, put the time on your calendar and stick with it. Don't allow any interruptions or distractions during your conversation.

Get creative with where you have the meeting. An excellent way to stay focused and avoid turning this conversation into a performance-focused one is to have it in a different location. Try going for a walking meeting outside or visiting a hip coffee shop.

A few days before the meeting, send the employee two or three questions you're planning to ask (steal a few from the list on the next page). This preparation helps the employee think before they come to the meeting, therefore making this time about their responses.

Set an agenda and a tone for the meeting. Before you get started, make sure the employee knows that he or she is a valuable member of your team. Make it clear that the goal of the conversation is for you to get to know the employee better and to understand his or her career aspirations.

How to keep the conversation focused...

- 1 Send an agenda in advance and include key questions you'll ask.
- 2 Keep your commitment and avoid rescheduling if possible.
- 3 Pick a creative space where performance review meetings don't usually happen, such as a walking trail or a coffee shop.
- 4 Avoid talking about any topics other than the employee's career—this isn't a project check-in or performance appraisal.
- 5 Ask more questions and give fewer answers.
- 6 End by recapping what the employee is accountable for and task him or her with scheduling your next career conversation.

DURING:

Once you've set the framework of the conversation, it's time to start asking the questions. After asking a question, get comfortable with silence. Give the employee time to digest and respond. Don't jump to a solution or conclusion. Instead, let this person explore their thoughts and emotions. If the conversation stalls or if the employee seems stuck on a particular question, you can give them an assignment to do more discovery in that area and have a targeted follow-up conversation.

The 15-minute career conversation helps you guide an employee through three areas of self-discovery. Here are suggested questions for each area:

Where they've been

- What would you describe as your biggest strength?
- What do you think is your biggest area for improvement?
- What project did you complete in the past year that made you feel successful?
- What was the most frustrating project you worked on recently?

Where they are now

- How can I best help you in your current role?
- What is your favorite part of your current role?
- What one skill would you like to develop to improve in your current role?

Where they're heading

- What does ultimate success look like for you in the next year? What about three years from now?
- What task or project type would you like to do more frequently in the future?
- What task or project type would you like to do less frequently in the future?
- How can I best help you achieve your career goals?
- Are there other individuals you would like me to enlist to help you achieve your career goals? (e.g., a colleague in a role you're interested in pursuing)

This list is only the starting point. As your conversations evolve, so will the questions you ask.

It's a good idea to take notes and keep a record of what commitments you make during the conversation. But, the employee should be making most of the commitments. Empower this person with initiating next steps, such as setting up your next conversation or beginning potential development projects. Remember, you want the employee to take full ownership and accountability of the action items necessary to advance his or her career.

AFTER:

After the conversation is over, it's crucial that you keep any commitments you made and do so promptly. You're building trust with this person, and the quickest way to do that is by keeping a promise.

Of course, a single 15-minute conversation isn't the be-all, end-all of career development. Becoming the coach your employees crave is about consistent involvement and repetition. So, make sure that you continue to have these conversations regularly. Genuine development happens a little bit every day and over time. It's all about the quality of the conversation and how you frame your role in the employee's development.

CHANGE THE CONVERSATION TO IMPROVE THE RELATIONSHIP

During a 15-minute career conversation, you can shift your role from boss and order-taker to coach and mentor. By asking key questions and shifting the accountability to the employee, you are giving that person control over their career path. With this shift in mindset and approach, you can give your millennials the coaching they crave and make them accountable for their development.

15-Minute Conversation Worksheet

This worksheet can help you take notes during coaching conversations and keep a record of your communication. Remember to ask questions, listen and take notes. During this conversation, you are a coach and a source of support. Your job is to remove barriers and point out opportunities. Don't try to own this person's career path.

Employee Name:

Date of Meeting:

KEY OBSERVATIONS:

Where have they been:

Where are they now:

Where are they going:

ACTIONS:

What commitments did the employee make?

By when will he/she complete them?

What commitments did you make?

By when will you complete them?

NEXT MEETING:

When will you meet with the employee next?

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Advantage

 (800) 494-6646

 contact@advantageperformance.com

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