

The Six-Question Coaching Process

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Team alignment, a sense of purpose, and belonging connected to a steady stream of communication is vital to the overall productivity of any team or work group. Understanding this is not enough, it takes a bit of time and consistency.

Astute leaders understand the need for alignment and dialog but are hobbled by the daily grind, time constraints, or simply losing track of this critical aspect of their job as a leader.

Here is a simple, effective method to have a constructive dialog with direct reports. This structure takes very little time and creates more clarity and shared direction within a team.

The key to effective two-way coaching is mutual responsibility. It is common for direct reports to criticize their executives for not providing help when it was needed. And yet executives will say direct reports never asked. If reports take responsibility for asking and executives take responsibility for making coaching a priority there's a high probability of a more cohesive, accountable, and motivated team.

Every 2 months: Spend 30 minutes with each direct report and have this conversation. Jot down basic notes.

Q1: Where are we going as a group/team/unit/company?

The first question deals with the “big picture.” You outline where the larger organization is going regarding vision, goals, and priorities and then ask where they think it should go. Involving them in this ongoing dialogue builds alignment and commitment to the larger organizational vision.

You might ask...

- How can I better help us to get to where we *should* be going? (Listen, don't argue, and accept the information as it is given.) If possible, agree to what you will do and provide follow-up, so they understand what actions have been taken.
- Look for ways to create a shared and agreed understanding if there are gaps.

It begins with this question: I see us going in this direction; where do you see us going?

- Look for agreement.

- Look for gaps in understanding.

Q2: Where are you going personally?

Question two deals with the individual's personal vision, goals, and priorities for their team or department. You get to hear the individual's view on where they think they are going and where they should be.

Consider:

- Is it where they should be going?
- Are they concentrating on what matters most? (Not just climbing the tree but making sure it is the right tree.)
- Be honest if you believe they are off course or need clarifications.

By the end of this discussion, the vision, goals, and priorities of their team/department should be aligned with:

- a. *Your* vision for the team
- b. The organization's vision

Q3: What are you doing well?

Ask: What do you think you are doing well... what are you proud of?

You might find the person you are managing is especially proud of something (a project, a task, etc.) that you didn't know about. This will give you the chance to acknowledge both them and the team under them. If what they're doing well/are proud of are directly connected to the team's success (i.e. relevant) – give positive feedback and enjoy the continuation of the behavior/results.

Follow up with:

- Here is *what I see* going well...

For You to Consider

- Were you aware that they had this success?
- Have you been able to acknowledge and highlight that success yourself or to your boss or colleagues? (Think: the power of positive feedback)

- Look for opportunities to do skip-level positive feedback – see Kevin’s article [“What Business People Can Learn from a Navy Captain”](#) (LinkedIn) to get some ideas on how to go about acknowledging successes one or two levels removed from you.

Q4: What can I do for you? How can I personally help you?

Having a trusted leader ask how they can help is revitalizing. Ensure what is asked for is doable and connected to the most important focus of that person’s work and responsibilities.

You will often find that they have no specific needs from you, in which case, simply by asking, you have gained trust and affinity.

Q5: What suggestions for improvement do you have for yourself? For me?

Often, you will find that their ideas for coaching themselves are better than yours – in which case, go with theirs!! “I like your ideas; let’s go with them.”

Then, if appropriate, suggest where you would like this leader to concentrate. Don’t shoot from the hip here. If you want them to look at these areas, be prepared to dig into the whys and the hows.

Then, honestly, ask how you can be a better supporter, leader, or coach to them. What do they need from you? One of the most powerful things a leader can do is ask the team he/she leads about their performance: How am I doing? What can I do better? If you were my coach, what would you suggest I work on?

(Note: You asked, so let them answer) Listen, acknowledge, and clarify only. Now is not the time to judge the answer to the question but to listen to it and consider what you learned.

Q6: Close the conversation with...

Ask one of the following four questions or one of your own:

- Is there anything we should start doing as a team?
- What are the biggest time-wasters for you every week?
- Would you like more or less direction for me on your work?
- Do you feel like you’re getting enough feedback on your work? If not, where would you like more?

Mutual Responsibility

Then finish with something like this:

"Thank you. This has been valuable to me, and I hope you as well. I am committed to meeting with you every two months to review our progress, discuss strategies, and address any challenges. I will prioritize crucial topics during these sessions, but I also want to hear what matters most to you.

Between our scheduled meetings, if you ever feel uncertain about our direction, strategies, or priorities, or if you require additional coaching or feedback, please reach out to me. I encourage you to take the initiative to communicate any concerns or needs immediately.

By taking responsibility for these regular dialogues and engaging proactively when you need guidance, we can ensure we stay on top of everything. Does this sound like a plan you can agree to?"