

Leadership Insights



Middlebury

Check-in Conversations

Have you ever wondered: Does anyone really know what I do? Is my work making any impact or difference? How can I continue to increase my knowledge, skills, abilities? What's next for me and my career? Would anyone notice or even care if I left? We would bet that if you haven't had these thoughts that your employees probably have.

In this Leadership Insights we'll discuss:

- [The purpose of check-in conversations](#)
- [Setting up your check-in meeting schedule](#)
- [Tips for reducing check-in anxiety](#)
- [How to make check-in conversations effective and productive](#)
- [Set it up for success: sample questions to ask](#)

The Purpose of Check-in Conversations

Check-in conversations are your avenue to help your employees answer these questions because they provide you with insights into how your employees are feeling, what they are experiencing, and provide you with an opportunity to align on individual and department goals and strategies. Check-in conversations allow you to address questions, concerns, or challenges your employee may be facing. They are also a great way to facilitate professional development conversations and create/review action plans (check out the previous [Professional Development Leadership Insights](#) edition for more about professional development).

Setting Up Your Check-in Meeting Schedule

Schedule check-in meetings at a regular cadence. For some positions and/or individuals, it might make sense to meet on a weekly or bi-weekly basis whereas other check-in meetings could be scheduled monthly. Your meeting schedule will depend on multiple factors and considerations, such as the complexity of the position, the career progression of the individual, and the level of coaching and mentoring needed for the individual.

Tips for Reducing Check-in Anxiety

If your team is new to regularly scheduled check-in conversations, it might feel a bit awkward at first. Your employees may even be a little suspicious of your intentions or worried that they've done something wrong. Conversely, you might be nervous and feel uncertain as well. Not to worry, as

check-in conversations become a more socialized routine with your team, much of the anxiety and fear will lessen.

Let your team know that you are going to be scheduling check-in meetings ahead of time. You could share this in a team meeting, via email, or in hallway conversations. Regardless of the format, giving your employee a heads up (rather than a surprise meeting invite) will help reduce stress. Be sure to share your intentions for the check-in meetings and provide a brief overview of what to expect. Provide employees with the opportunity to ask questions or clarify expectation for the check-in conversations.

How to Make Check-in Conversations Effective and Productive

Create a format for the meeting. Considerations: Are there topics that should be reviewed at every meeting? Does your employee prefer a structured meeting with outlined topics/agenda items, or do they prefer a more casual meeting format? Are you leaving room for professional development conversations? How will you provide space to connect on a more personal or deeper professional level so that your employees feel seen and validated? Depending on your style, it may be helpful to prepare discussion points or a list of things you would like to explore during the conversation.

During the meeting:

- Be fully present. It's easy to get distracted with the pinging of emails, chat, messages, and texts. If you're consistently checking your phone or computer during the check-in meeting, it could lead to the false perception that the person you are meeting with is not important and can quickly shut down a conversation.
- Share positive feedback. Express gratitude for their work. The more specific you can be the more meaningful the positive feedback will be. "Your work in moving that project over the finish line by collaborating with Jane Doe and creating the spreadsheet tracker was impressive" has more impact than "Great job on that project."
- Ask what challenges or problems the employee is facing in their work. Depending on the topic and/or the individual, use a coaching method of problem solving to strengthen your employee's skills and abilities.
- Check-in on, or discuss opportunities for, stretch assignments to aid in career growth and professional development.
- Provide an opportunity for the employee to give *you* feedback.
- Be flexible. Maybe you had an agenda to get through, but something happened and your employee needs support with something that is urgent or pressing or simply needs to talk. Shifting gears to focus on more pressing topics will demonstrate your support and proficiency as a leader.

After the meeting, it may be helpful to provide a short recap of agreed upon action items. Be sure to also follow up on any items that you committed to doing.

Set it up For Success: Sample Questions to Ask

During the meeting, open-ended questions are best. They keep the conversation going because they can't be answered in one word (e.g., "fine," "yes," "no," "ok").

Below are some sample questions to consider asking during each check-in with your employee. Asking similar questions each time can help you and your staff member see progress that has been achieved over time and where more support is needed.

- What is going well at work right now?
- What is something that has brought you joy or excitement?
- What's a talent or skill that you don't use at work that could benefit the team?
- What obstacles or challenges are you facing at work?
 - What strategies have you tried to overcome those challenges?
 - How can I support you in overcoming those challenges?
- How does your work here align with your career goals?
- Do you feel supported by leadership?
- What is something you wished I had asked that I didn't?

If check-ins are new to you, don't worry if your initial meetings have some awkward silence or long-winded responses. That's normal. Over time, your check-in meetings will develop a regular cadence and become more efficient as you adapt to this valuable communication tool.

Additional Resources

- Link to *A Manager's Checklist for Employee Check-ins* blog post: [A Manager's Checklist for Employee Check-ins \(employee-performance.com\)](#)
- Link to *175 Best Check-in Questions for Employees in 2022* blog post: [175 Best Check-in Questions for Employees in 2022 \(teambuilding.com\)](#)
- Link to *The 3 Meetings You Should Have for remote Workers* article: [The 3 Meetings You Should Have for Remote Workers \(entrepreneur.com\)](#)
- *FYI: For Your Improvement- Competencies Development Guide* book (purchase through your preferred book store or visit your HR Business Partner)
- [Linkedin Learning Course – Providing Feedback](#)
- [Linkedin Learning – Stay Connected via Formal and Informal Feedback](#)

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