

THE PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS POCKETBOOK

Frank Scott-Lennon & Sinéad Scott-Lennon

Drawings by Phil Hailstone

“Clearly sets out how regular Performance Conversations can be a great aid in focusing and motivating staff; we have found the skills section particularly helpful.”

Billy Doyle, CEO, Dundalk Credit Union

“At Integrity360 our whole approach to performance appraisals has been greatly improved by the insights within this book and, as a by-product, communications between all levels of staff have been enhanced beyond recognition.”

Eoin Goulding, Founder & CEO of Integrity360

CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION & BENEFITS 5
Why you should consider conducting regular performance conversations



CHANGING PRACTICE 11
The reasons for dissatisfaction with conventional performance appraisals, and a case study



PROCESS FOR PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS 25
A mnemonic for a good process: C L E F T – Conversations, Leadership, Expectations, Future Focus, Timely



KEY SKILLS 35
You will need a range of skills: preparation, a good structure, future focus, listening, prioritising, joint decision-making, drawing out, coaching, mediating and the ability to provide enabling conditions



OBJECTIVE SETTING 51
How to make objectives specific and measurable, with examples; objectives must be achievable, challenging and jointly agreed, how to structure them



LINKING TO PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL 63
Ways to use elements from performance conversations to enhance annual appraisals, focusing on the future, employee development, removing surprises, less emphasis on forms



PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS WITH TEAMS 75
Structure of team conversations, listening to the team, achieving focus, prioritising and empowering, putting supports in place, team reviews



DIFFICULT PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS 89
Procrastination, planning for difficult conversations, specify the shortfall and explore the reasons, structure of the meeting, next steps



CONCLUDING ACTION POINTS 103
Questions to ask yourself, and initial and ongoing actions to undertake



PROCESS FOR PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS

PROCESS FOR PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS



OVERVIEW

We have devised a useful mnemonic, **CLEFT**, for developing a good process for performance conversations:

Conversations
Leadership
Expectations
Future focus
Timely



PROCESS FOR PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS



OVERVIEW

And now a little of the detail:

- **C**onversations: just like ordinary conversations, performance conversations should be fully two-way. They should focus primarily on current and future priorities, with the clear objective of motivating your team member
- **L**eadership: your leadership role requires that you create a meaningful vision with clear direction that will be sufficiently strong to provide focus and motivation for people
- **E**xpectations: reaching a shared and clear understanding of expectations and clarity around the objectives that will deliver those expectations
- **F**uture focus: maintaining a shared focus on current and future priorities, with only minimal 'looking back'
- **T**imely: establishing a pattern of monthly or six-weekly conversations will enliven commitment and productivity

As the core part of this book, we will treat each element of **C L E F T** in turn in the coming pages.

PROCESS FOR PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS

C L E F T – ‘C’ for **CONVERSATIONS**



Conversations are dialogues that we regularly engage in during our daily lives, with the emphasis on them being two-way, fully involving the other person.

Performance conversations should be no different and it is up to you to ensure that they are truly two-way, ensuring the full participation of your team member.

Time and time again, employees have indicated that such performance conversations are motivating for them, particularly when their managers are genuinely listening.

You as the manager can best do this by asking for the employee's view of the current work programme and about what is planned for the immediate future; doing this will get the conversation flowing in the right way from the start.

All of this will help your critical task of providing increased focus and motivation.

PROCESS FOR PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS



C L E F T – ‘L’ for LEADERSHIP

Your role as a leader does not take from your role as a manager, it enriches it. Leadership requires you to inspire those around you with your view of the future and the manner in which you go about achieving that vision.

Your primary task as a leader is to get your team members committed to the vision and fully aboard; this you do by encouraging them to ‘get on the bus’, as it were. Good leaders behave in a manner that brings team members with them on a shared journey.

Regular use of performance conversations will contribute greatly to ensuring that you get to this point of full sharing of where you and your team member need to go to achieve the planned outcomes.

If you think of well-known successful leaders you will see that is what they do – they inspire team members to work assiduously on delivering this shared vision over the short and long-haul.

PROCESS FOR PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS

C L E F T – ‘E’ for **EXPECTATIONS**



Clarifying expectations between you and your employee will develop further your mutual understanding of the areas you want them to concentrate on.

‘Expectations’ is our term for what each of you see as the **outputs** that are required, and a clear mutual understanding of these is essential. You will only get mutuality if you clearly search for and listen to his or her expectations.

Focusing on the key result areas within the job will allow both you and the team member to identify (i) the most important areas for emphasis and (ii) the outputs that are required in those areas.

Thus, your performance conversations should clearly give attention to this process of clarifying expectations to the point where you will be able to set jointly agreed objectives around these outputs; we will treat this key skill of objective setting in a later chapter.

PROCESS FOR PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS

C L E F T – ‘F’ for **FUTURE FOCUS**



Keep the focus on the future by stressing from the outset that current and future priorities are your main concern. Ask questions that prompt discussion, such as:

- Can we share our view of your priorities for the immediate future?
- What in your view are achievable objectives with tangible outputs?
- What obstacles can we foresee and how might we surmount them?
- From whom do we need full collaboration and how can we be sure to get it?
- What can I do to support your achievements in the coming period?

Having opened various sections of the discussion with the above or similar questions, it is then up to you to add your view, get to agreement and ensure that a good action plan is in place.

PROCESS FOR PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS

C L E F T – ‘F’ for **FUTURE FOCUS**



A final thought about future focus. Don't forget to take a quick look backwards as well.

Whilst maintaining your forward looking focus you should briefly include the period just past by asking:

'What went well
and why?'

'What could we
improve and how?'

You may gain great learning for the future period from this quick look-back.



PROCESS FOR PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS

C L E F T – ‘T’ for **TIMELY**



Completing your schedule of performance conversations on time is a personal discipline that really should grab your commitment.

If you have fully internalised the idea that such conversations are highly motivational for your team, then it should be relatively easy to set aside the necessary time.

Failure to make the time for these conversations sends a poor message to your team, a message that you can do without.

You all stand to reap the benefits of such prioritisation of your time. So, it is up to you to prioritise your time management to ensure that you take these regular opportunities for developing togetherness of thought with your team members.

PROCESS FOR PERFORMANCE CONVERSATIONS



SUMMARY

For successful performance conversations you need **C L E F T**:

- C** – Get into conversation mode through being sure to listen attentively to your team members
- L** – Inspire them to enhance performance for the long term
- E** – Clarify really well what important outputs are required
- F** – Maintain a predominant future focus
- T** – Get into the habit of having these conversations every four to six weeks

KEY QUESTIONS FOR YOU

Take a moment to reflect on the above brief explanation of performance conversations and ask yourself:

- Could performance conversations be a useful process with my team members?
- If so, where would I start?
- Have I enough of the required skills to make a start with the process?

AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

FRANK SCOTT-LENNON

Frank is based in Dublin and he has extensive experience as a practising manager, business owner and author of several books.

He has been practising as a management consultant for many years and has particular expertise in the areas of performance management, team development, organisational strategy, transformational change, mediations & investigations, building personal and organisational resilience, skill development and wellbeing initiatives for organisations. He has consulted to many large organisations and SMEs in Ireland, the UK and in Europe.

Frank can be contacted at Frank@HRforBetterWorkplaces.ie or +353 86 2560082.



SINÉAD SCOTT-LENNON

Sinéad initially worked in Dublin but has worked in London for many years.

Her main focus has been in communications and PR, initially within the consumer and financial services sector and most recently with top-branded charities including Dogs Trust, the UK and Ireland's largest dog welfare charity, and is currently working with BookTrust, the UK's largest children's reading charity. Sinéad has significant experience in managing teams and in performance management, event management and also in crisis and reputation management.

Sinéad can be contacted at Sinead@HRforBetterWorkplaces.ie or +44 7834 375327.

Both Frank and Sinéad, separately and together, provide short incisive training sessions aimed at developing the skills for achieving excellence in performance conversations.

