



# CAREER CONVERSATIONS

*Employee-driven. Development-oriented. Simple.*

# Career Conversations Guide

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# Career Conversations Overview

## What are Career Conversations?

Career Conversations are structured discussions between employees and their supervisors that are designed to support employee success through reflection, planning, problem solving, and honest and constructive feedback. Career Conversations begin when employees reflect on significant accomplishments, key strengths, and plans for the future.

## Why is the University moving to this approach?

During 2015 and 2016, Human Resources sponsored gatherings with more than 300 employees and supervisors to collect feedback about the University's current performance management approach. Both employees and supervisors expressed interest in a more honest, practical, forward-looking approach that would enhance performance and support positive working relationships.

## What is the value of honest, direct and regular feedback?

- ▶ Better performance and higher productivity
- ▶ Stronger teams and work groups
- ▶ More trust
- ▶ Greater job satisfaction
- ▶ Early alerts about performance concerns

## Why do Career Conversations address strengths?

We do our best work and are most engaged when we are encouraged to use our individual strengths. Conversations about strengths may provide employees and supervisors with the opportunity to offer or modify responsibilities in alignment with interests and areas of mastery.

## What kinds of strengths should be noted?

The Strength Examples list included in this guide may help employees think about the strengths they bring to their roles.

## How should the *do more, do less, start, stop, or change* section be completed?

We asked several employees for examples of items they plan to include in this section to create a list of **Do More, Do Less, Start, Stop, or Change Examples**, which you will find at the end of this guide.

## What if a supervisor disagrees with the key accomplishments, strengths, or plans for the future an employee has reported?

We encourage supervisors to be honest and share their perspective. Supervisor may note these disagreements in writing or invite the employee to revise their content based on the Career Conversation.

## What if an employee disagrees with the supervisor's comments?

We appreciate it can be difficult to express disagreement with a supervisor, but honest conversations make for better working relationships. If the supervisor chooses not to change the comments, the employee may document the disagreement on the Career Conversation form.

## Why are there no ratings?

Ratings can detract from meaningful conversation and each supervisor applies ratings differently, meaning ratings cannot be compared across supervisors. Employees and supervisors alike say that ratings are hard to determine, create unnecessary stress, and often damage relationships.

## Aren't ratings required to make decisions about discipline and continued employment?

Quality comments with specific details are more helpful in guiding decision making than ratings.

## Aren't ratings required to make decisions about pay increases?

Pay decisions are best made based on contributions, internal equity, and external market factors. Quality comments with specific details can be more helpful in assessing contributions than are ratings, which likely vary depending on whether a supervisor is a "hard" or "easy" grader.

## Should Career Conversations be used to document unsatisfactory performance?

Career Conversations may provide an opportunity to reiterate performance expectations or highlight concerns about the future, but supervisors are strongly advised not to delay conversations about the need for performance improvement. Addressing performance concerns with an employee as soon as they emerge and developing an improvement plan prevents problems from escalating.

## How do Career Conversations work?

1. **Employee:** completes SELF-REFLECTION and PLANNING sections of the Career Conversation template based on agreements made during the previous Career Conversation or performance review.
2. **Supervisor:** schedules a time for a Career Conversation meeting, and in preparation for the Career Conversation, reviews employee self-reflection and plan and makes discussion notes.
3. **Employee and Supervisor:** have Career Conversation.
4. **Supervisor:** makes summary comments and signs off on the Career Conversations document.
5. **Employee:** reviews, acknowledges receipt of supervisor comments, and offers optional final comments.
6. **Both Employee and Supervisor:** use completed Career Conversation for periodic and informal Career Conversation Check-ins.

## How often should Career Conversations occur?

Career conversations should be conducted on a regular basis and documented in writing at least once a year.

## What are Career Conversation Check-Ins?

Career Conversation Check-Ins are periodic and informal conversations to ensure that an employee is on track with established plans. These check-ins can also be used to identify and address any concerns the employee or supervisor might have. Employees are encouraged to lead these conversations and to be prepared with check-in questions such as:

- ▶ Am I on track based on the Career Conversation plan we created?
- ▶ Would you consider letting me have "quiet time" for two hours a day?
- ▶ Have you heard concerns about my work on the project committee?
- ▶ Can we discuss how I might work better with Veronica?
- ▶ Could I lead the next project team you create?
- ▶ What do I need to do to be considered for the next managerial opening?

# Career Conversations Process Model



**Step 1: employee completes self-reflection, then shares with supervisor**

|                        |                            |                    |                            |
|------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Employee's Name        | Celina Washington          | Supervisor's Name  | Reynaldo Diaz              |
| Employee's Title       | Sales Assistant            | Supervisor's Title | Assistant Store Supervisor |
| Department/Unit        | UA Threads Campus Emporium |                    |                            |
| Reflection Period from | 7/1/2016                   | to                 | 6/30/2017                  |

**ACKNOWLEDGING ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

At least 3 of my notable accomplishments during this reflection period

- Based on repeated customer requests, I suggested we add UA sleepwear to our inventory.
- Participated in the project team to improve scheduling.
- Designed a front window display that was featured in Retail Minded magazine.

*Supervisor's Response:*

Adding pajamas and nightshirts to our inventory has been extraordinary profitable. You identified an important customer need. Your work on the scheduling project team was outstanding and team members commented that you proposed several creative ideas. Your lunchtime scheduling suggestion has reduced cashier wait times significantly. Congratulations on achieving recognition for your "UA in Your Dreams" sleepwear window display.

**HIGHLIGHTING KEY STRENGTHS**

At least 3 key strengths that make me effective in my role and examples of how I have applied them

**Ability to calm people down** - A grandfather who wanted 46 UA sweatshirts for a family reunion in San Diego was angry when we didn't have them in stock. I offered to place a special order and have them delivered to the reunion hotel.

**Observation skills** - I noticed that placing socks by the front door made it easy for shoplifters to take them on the way out of the store. Once we moved the display, the problem was solved.

**Teaching skills** - Most of the new student workers come to me for advice on procedures.

*Supervisor's Response:*

You consistently exceed customer expectations. Thank you for your keen powers of observation. Moving the UA sock bin has saved us more than \$2,000 in lost revenue in the last two months. I appreciate your willingness to support our new student workers.

**SETTING GOALS FOR SUCCESS**

At least 3 goals I would like to work toward during the next 6-12 months

Shadow one of our merchandisers to learn more about product placement.

Attend a "Diffusing Angry Customers" workshop.

Assume charge of training all new student workers to increase my management experience.

*Supervisor's Response:*

I've let Megan know that you will be shadowing her to learn merchandizing. We will register you for a "Diffusing Angry Customers" workshop. You are valued for your ability to explain procedures. I'd like you to begin partnering with Samir to design our new orientation program.

**MAKING SMART CHANGES**

3 things I want to do more, do less, start, stop, or change to be even more effective in my role (Focus on behaviors, practices, etc.)

1. Change: Our orientation process. If new people understood our processes more quickly, I would need to spend less time explaining things.
2. Do less: Writing. I prefer interacting with people.
3. Start: Positioning myself for a promotion.

**Supervisor's Response:**

I look forward to your suggestions for the new orientation program. As we discussed, report writing is a requirement for your role. Hector has agreed to serve as your writing coach, and I hope you will take advantage of the opportunity to learn from him.

**Step 2: supervisor and employee meet and discuss, then supervisor makes summary responses, and signs**

Supervisor's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Click here to enter a date.

*If employee's overall performance is less-than satisfactory, please describe the plan of action*

Celina, I appreciate your exceptional work ethic, creativity, and commitment to the customer experience. You are consistently looking for ways to improve our products, processes, and approaches, and your contributions have contributed to stronger revenue growth during the past year. I want to support you in pursuing promotion opportunities in our store. Project team membership, job shadowing, and attention to improving your writing will position you to be competitive for a larger role.

**Step 3: employee reviews supervisor's response, adds optional final comments, and signs**

Employee's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Click here to enter a date.

*Employee's Final Comments (optional)*

Click or tap here to enter text.

**Step 1: employee completes self-reflection, then shares with supervisor**

|                        |                              |                    |             |
|------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Employee's Name        | Zane Lee                     | Supervisor's Name  | Imogen Dash |
| Employee's Title       | Communications Supervisor    | Supervisor's Title | Dean        |
| Department/Unit        | College of Culinary Sciences |                    |             |
| Reflection Period from | 7/1/2016                     | to                 | 6/30/2017   |

**ACKNOWLEDGING ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

At least 3 of my notable accomplishments during this reflection period

- Created a UAFoodies Twitter account that now has 12,000+ followers.
- Organized a Smart Food Symposium in partnership with the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences that attracted 100 award-winning chefs and leading food and nutrition researchers. Each of the presentation clips posted on YouTube has more than 100,000 views.
- Our "Don't Eat That!" campaign for K-6 students has been adopted by 51 school districts within 14 states.

*Supervisor's Response:*

Our national profile has been elevated and the media attention you have garnered is impressive. The growing visibility through social media is exciting. However, we agreed that you had two key priorities for 2015: (1) developing a communications strategic plan with College leadership and (2) updating all of our communication materials in accordance with UA brand guidelines. No progress has been made on either.

**HIGHLIGHTING KEY STRENGTHS**

At least 3 key strengths that make me effective in my role and examples of how I have applied them

**Social media expertise** - In the last 12 months, I helped 36 faculty members establish active social media profiles to highlight and promote their research and community involvement.

**Results Orientation** - I replaced all my staff and established rigorous performance metrics.

**Community Connections** - My engagement with major donors and community leaders has positioned the College of Culinary Sciences as one of the UA's most innovative academic enterprises.

*Supervisor's Response:*

Our faculty are enjoying the opportunity to share their research and perspectives via Twitter, especially. #ThankYou! I appreciate your commitment to quality and accountability, but the turnover in your area is a great cause of concern for me. 4 of your 5 staff members have resigned in the last six months and have cited "difficult working conditions" as their reason for leaving.

**SETTING GOALS FOR SUCCESS**

At least 3 goals I would like to work toward during the next 6-12 months

Hold a "Food Truck Entrepreneurs of the Southwest" competition in partnership with the Eller College of Management.

Attend the Global Higher Education Social Media Summit in Hong Kong in August.

Update our communication materials in alignment with the University's Never Settle plan.

*Supervisor's Response:*

As we discussed, the food truck idea is interesting, but not aligned with our research or outreach mission. We agreed that your key priorities for the next six months are to (1) Prepare and secure support for our strategic communication plan, (2) Update our communication materials to conform to UA brand guidelines, and (3) Develop a mockup for a new college website.

**MAKING SMART CHANGES**

3 things I want to do more, do less, start, stop, or change to be even more effective in my role (Focus on behaviors, practices, etc.)

1. Do more: Public speaking to position myself as an international authority on university communication strategy.
2. Stop: Attending meetings that are a waste of my time.
3. Change: The requirement that our college follow UA branding guidelines. I need freedom to convey the essence of our unique position in the academic arena.

**Supervisor's Response:**

During our conversation, we discussed the importance of focusing on the college's visibility. Your professional profile will increase if you do good work on our behalf. I stressed my expectation that you will actively engage with University communication professionals and noted that forging strong relationships will position you to make recommendations about branding guidelines.

**Step 2: supervisor and employee meet and discuss, then supervisor makes summary responses, and signs**

Supervisor's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

[Click here to enter a date.](#)

*If employee's overall performance is less-than satisfactory, please describe the plan of action*

Zane, you are an innovative and well-connected communication expert, and you have achieved impressive results on several fronts during the last year. I am very pleased with the increased visibility. Your results have not occurred without costs, however. You have damaged relationships with communications professionals across campus by disparaging the University's branding guidelines and refusing to participate in institutional meetings. The turnover within your group is excessive, and your leadership style has prompted complaints from both your staff and other college leaders. I am frustrated that a year has gone by without progress on a communications strategic plan or significant updates to our communication materials. It is imperative that you complete both of these projects. I must also note that your effort seems to be focused more on your own professional visibility than on the college's success. I am concerned about your long-term prospects here if you cannot address these concerns.

**Step 3: employee reviews supervisor's response, adds optional final comments, and signs**

Employee's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

[Click here to enter a date.](#)

*Employee's Final Comments (optional)*

[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

# Strengths Examples

This table lists some of the types of strengths that might be noted in a Career Conversation. We encourage employees and supervisors to be creative when considering strengths. This list is for example purposes only.

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Accuracy</b>                    | Produces work products that are correct, factual, and free of errors.   |
| <b>Analysis</b>                    | Is able to make sense of information to support projects and planning.  |
| <b>Communication</b>               | Is able to convey information effectively through writing, presentations, or speaking.  |
| <b>Compassion</b>                  | Demonstrates an understanding of another person's situation and the desire to alleviate concern or distress.  |
| <b>Coaching/developing others</b>  | Supports the success of others by sharing knowledge and advice and connecting them to supportive resources.   |
| <b>Courage</b>                     | Faces difficulty, adversity, risk or danger with confidence.  |
| <b>Creativity</b>                  | Uses imagination or artistic abilities to develop original content or ideas.  |
| <b>Decision-making</b>             | Gathers necessary information, weighs alternatives, and engages with others when appropriate before and after committing to a course of action.                       |
| <b>Environmental scanning</b>      | Constantly monitors the internal and external environment to identify trends, opportunities, and threats to the institution.  |
| <b>Flexibility</b>                 | Is able and willing to shift activities, priorities, and approaches based on new demands.   |
| <b>Initiative</b>                  | Proactively takes steps to make the organization stronger by providing ideas, developing solutions, and offering suggestions for improvement                          |
| <b>Integrity</b>                   | Honors commitments; maintains confidences; follows laws, policies and procedures; considers the needs of others; and does not take unfair advantage of opportunities. |
| <b>Interpersonal communication</b> | Listens well, demonstrates empathy for the other person's perspective or situation, and is able to establish common ground in order to resolve tension or conflict.   |

## Strengths Examples (continued)

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Planning and Organizing</b>  | Prioritizes work, manages resources and information effectively, and uses time wisely to accomplish tasks and goals.           |
| <b>Problem solving</b>          | Identifies and defines problems, considers multiple solutions, and makes considered judgments about the best approach forward. |
| <b>Reliability</b>              | Consistently produces accurate, high quality work within established deadlines.  |
| <b>Relationship building</b>    | Is able to forge mutually beneficial partnerships with others.   |
| <b>Researching</b>              | Systematically inquires or investigates in order to discover new knowledge or revise facts or theories.                        |
| <b>Results orientation</b>      | Sets or accepts ambitious goals and consistently moves work and projects forward to completion.                                |
| <b>Strategic</b>                | Uses data, ideas, relationships, and resources to achieve goals.   |
| <b>Subject matter expertise</b> | Demonstrates special knowledge of a field, process, or profession.   |
| <b>Teaching</b>                 | Effectively conveys information in order to help others learn or understand information and concepts.                          |
| <b>Team work</b>                | Works effectively in a team setting. Listens well, considers diverse opinions, and contributes fully to the team's success.    |
| <b>Tenacity</b>                 | Demonstrates determination and persistence.  |

# Do More, Do Less, Start, Stop, or Change Examples

We asked several employees what they would like to do more, do less, start, stop or change to be even more effective in their roles. Perhaps their ideas will inspire you to consider how you would like to complete this section of the Career Conversations template.

## **Do More**

Listening. Writing projects. Deep breathing to manage my emotions.

## **Do Less**

Last-minute projects. Front-line work. Work by myself. Presentation design.

## **Start**

Learning how to use survey software. Expressing my opinions. Letting coworkers know when I think they aren't pulling their weight. Wearing headphones so I don't get brought into side conversations.

## **Stop**

Saying "yes" to all requests to serve on committees. Attending so many evening events. Letting my frustration show in email responses. Believing rumors before verifying them to be true.

## **Change**

My schedule so that I can avoid morning traffic. The way pricing agreements are made. My workload distribution so that I can focus more on research and less on project management.