



## **ZIPPER COACHING CONVERSATION**

Truly great leaders aren't just managers, they are coaches too. That means they excel at creating clarity, providing direction, giving feedback, and recognizing the contribution of others.

One of the easiest ways to ensure you do this is to follow the Zipper Coaching Conversation template. A zipper has to be in alignment for things to work right, when that happens it stays in alignment. This conversation is meant to function like a zipper in your relationship to your people.

Here's how it works:

- Schedule 1 to 1 meetings with your direct reports every two to three months: The agenda for these meetings is coaching, not business issues, unless it serves the coaching objective.
- Have the questions written in front of you to help you reference them.
- Consider taking notes when your people talk, it conveys respect and gives you something to refer back to later.

Ask these questions in this order:

**1. *Here's my sense of where we are headed...What's your sense of where we (the team, department, or organization) should be going?***

Depending on your level and kind of organization, pick which category is most relevant. Share your perspective first, this is the big picture over the next six months. Then find out what they think. This is about getting alignment in two directions: From you to them, and from them to you. Both the big picture, you have line of sight they won't. And the cropped in picture, they have line of sight on details you don't.

**2. *Here's my sense of where you and your part of the organization are going... Where do you think you and your part should be going?***

This is similar to the question above, but here you are focusing in on their desires for themselves. How and where do they see what they are doing fitting into the larger picture? Be sure to tell them your perspective first, than invite their reflection.

3. ***Here's what I see you really doing well... What do you think you're doing well? What are you most proud of?***

This is not a question we are often asked by our managers. Here you might get answers that will help you know how and where to recognize team members. A big factor in engagement. For some people they may not have an immediate answer. Don't let them walk past this one. Really expect them to show up and answer it.

4. ***What are some areas you'd like to improve in?***

As your manager here are some suggestions that might help you do even better moving forward. You're focusing on the future more than the past here. Then ask the person, ***if you were the coach for you, what advice would you have for you?*** This one can often yield really revealing and helpful answers.

5. ***How can I help? We've talked about where you want to go and what you want. How can I help you get there?***

Asking this question helps people know you are someone who wants to listen and is here to support in any way possible.

6. ***What suggestions do you have for me to be a better manager?***

This is a great catch all question that ensures you are getting the most information you can about how a team member is experiencing you. The first time you ask it, they may not have much to say, but after a couple of times, they should warm to the question and give you actionable feedback.

**Shared Responsibility:**

The first time you have this meeting, say to them, *"Every two or three months I will meet with you to go through these questions. But if at any time between these meetings you are experiencing ambiguity, confusion, not clear on priorities, not clear on direction, I want you to take responsibility to come and talk to me. If we each do our part, there should be no reason we won't have great clarity and shared direction."*