Conversation Starters

Some supervisors and team members have asked for additional suggestions to help their ENGAGE conversations focus on development, not just day-to-day tasks.

This document provides additional suggestions to focus on professional development and improving how we work together. It is designed primarily for supervisors, but every team member will benefit from it. The list is long. Not every question will be relevant to every ENGAGE conversation. Instead, supervisors and team members can consider these suggestions and adapt them to best fit the context for each conversation.

Remember that it is always good to start with a person's strengths or areas that demonstrated improvements. Statements like "things I've noticed you do well include…" go a long way to establishing a constructive rhythm.

This document supplements "A Team Member's Guide to ENGAGE," "A Supervisor's Guide to ENGAGE," and the training videos on the ENGAGE website (**https://oa.mo.gov/engage**).

Questions for most ENGAGE conversations (adapted from Marshall Goldsmith)**:**
- Where do you feel the team is heading?
- Where are you heading – with your work, with your team, and with the department? Where do you want to be heading?
- What are you most proud of in the past month?
- What can you improve upon? Or: what advice would you give yourself?
- How can I help you?
- How can I improve?

Questions to more deeply explore specific topics with team members:

Identifying the team member's long-term goals [most relevant for early conversations]:
- What are your goals for the next year? Next 3 years? In 5 years?
- What goals or initiatives do you want to focus on this year?
- Do you always see yourself in this type/scope of work or are there other areas of interest you have within the department, elsewhere in state government, or outside of government?
- Who do you turn to for professional guidance and why?

Clarifying the team member's current role:
- How would you describe your job to someone outside of the department?
- What do you think of the department's plan for change (for each department's summary, see: strategicchange.mo.gov)? How do you see yourself contributing to the department's major change themes?
- How would you say you contribute to the department's mission and helping the citizens of Missouri?
- On a scale of 1 to 5, how much of a difference do you feel you make in your job? What can we do to move that higher?
- Are there any parts of your job that you are uncertain about – or you don't understand the expectations and outcomes representative of doing your job well?

For additional information, go to: https://oa.mo.gov/engage (Version 1, May 10, 2018)

Assisting the team member's self-assessment:
- What was your biggest win this month?
- What's going well? Why?
- What are five adjectives that you feel best describe personal and/or professional attributes that you possess and how you use them to do your current job?
- In what areas do you believe you can improve? What is your plan for working on those issues?
- Is there any aspect of your job in which you feel you need coaching?
- If you went home today and told your family you experienced the best day at work, what would that day look like? How can I help you achieve that day – everyday?
- What challenges are you facing or have you faced this month? Why were they challenging?
- Is there a recent situation you wished you handled differently? How would you handle it now?
- Is there a recent situation you feel you handled really well?

Helping the team member improve:
- Of all the tasks you do – what is your least favorite? Why? Do you have a suggestion or would you like to brainstorm with your team to make suggestions on improving it?
- What skills do you offer that are most relevant to this job?
- What trainings would you like to attend and why?
- Are there areas within our department you would like to learn more about?
- Are you interested in being assigned to special projects or committees?

Finding ways to work together better:
- If there is one thing you could change about our work, what would it be?
- If you could share one work tip with your colleagues, what would it be?
- What have you seen or learned recently that changed the way you work – and you wish others would do to? [Note: sources can include personal experience, advice from a colleague, tips from an ENGAGE or MyQuickCoach video, etc.]
- How could you contribute to improving our team?
- Are there things I/others can do differently to improve our team's effectiveness?
- Are there any improvements or initiatives we should do this year to improve our team?
- Is there anything I could do or stop doing that would make it easier to work with me?
- What do you value most in a supervisor?
- What could I do to help you or the team more?
- It isn't easy to give or receive difficult feedback. How would you prefer to receive feedback from me?

Questions for use when coaching supervisors who manage others:
- How are your ENGAGE conversations going?
- Do you think you will have any challenging conversations this month? If so, with whom and how do you plan to approach the conversation?
- Do you have any "rock stars" on your team? If so, what are you doing to help accelerate their development? Can they take on new responsibilities? Are there trainings they can attend?
- What do you think of the ENGAGE videos and other training materials? Are you watching the MyQuickCoach videos? What are you hearing from your teams? What can we do to make ENGAGE better?

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