

ebook

How-to Guide to Agent Coaching Conversations

5 key themes and questions for impactful 1:1s



Introduction

As a contact center supervisor or manager, having productive 1:1s and coaching conversations with your agents is arguably your most important responsibility. These are pivotal moments that matter to an agent's experience.

When done well, your 1:1s can lay the foundation for meaningful, trust-based relationships and unlock agent potential and success. But, preparing for and facilitating these conversations on a consistent and continuous basis can feel daunting.

What should you talk about? How do you get agents to open up? How do you make the most of the short time you have together?

In this eBook, we'll explore five key themes, with accompanying questions, to help guide your 1:1 conversations and empower you to deliver more impactful 1:1s to boost agent engagement and performance.



How to use this guide

The following themes can jumpstart your 1:1s and help create a collaborative, trust-based relationship with your agents, but there are some “Do’s” and “Don’ts” to keep in mind:

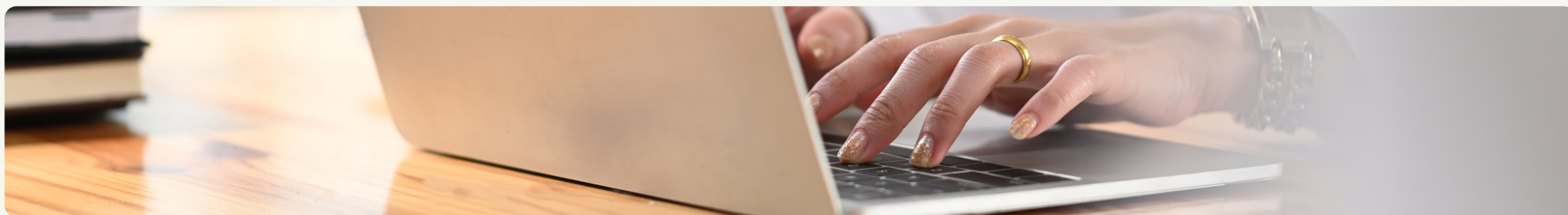
DO

- Pick one question to start with, listen intently, and play off your agent’s answer to trigger organic conversation.
- Ask follow-up questions to keep the conversation flowing.
- Start the conversation by letting the agent know this is a safe place and you want their candid perspective and answers.
- Practice active listening and let the agent share all their thoughts before responding.
- Take notes so you can remember and follow up accordingly. Ensure the agent knows the notes will be kept in a safe and private place.

DON’T

- Treat the sample questions like a laundry or checklist you have to get through.
- Try to cover too many themes or questions in one session.
- Dominate the conversation or push your agenda.
- Get defensive or interject if the agent says something you disagree with.
- Multitask, especially if you’re meeting virtually. Close all other tabs, programs, and internal messaging platforms to reduce temptation and eliminate distractions.

Now that we’ve covered those guidelines, let’s dive into our five key themes.



1 - Professional development and job satisfaction

According to [Pew Research](#), 63% of surveyed employees who left their jobs in 2021 cited a lack of career advancement opportunities as a leading reason for their resignation, and research by [SQM Group](#) confirms that this statistic is particularly relevant to the contact center. The best contact center managers have deliberate, ongoing conversations with agents about their career goals and aspirations. They work together to develop a plan to build a bridge to their future.



Role-specific strengths and opportunities

Understanding what agents enjoy, dislike, excel in, and struggle with in their current role enables you to tailor your coaching, identify projects that involve the activities they enjoy, and provide leadership opportunities to coach others who struggle where they excel.

- Imagine a day you leave work feeling motivated and happy. What did you do that day? What did or didn't happen that day?
- Where do you think you have the greatest area of opportunity on the job?
- What do you wish you were doing more of?
- What do you like about being a contact center agent?
- What do you dislike about being an agent?
- Think back to when you accepted this role. What were you excited about? How has it lived up to your expectations?
- When do your teammates look to you for help?
- Are there any projects your teammates are working on that you'd like to work on?



Career planning

A great manager not only leads an agent to success in their current role but also prepares them for a meaningful career—whether that's inside or outside the organization. Demonstrate a vested interest in their long-term success and identify cross-functional development opportunities to prepare agents for future roles.

- What other roles or functions do you see yourself in? Why? What interests you about those roles?
- What type of work do you enjoy doing?
- What's next for you in your career?
- What kinds of problems do you want to solve?
- When you were a kid, what did you think you'd be when you grew up and why?
- Do you have a dream job?
- What career would you choose if money wasn't a factor?
- If you could go back to school tomorrow, what would you major in?
- If you could have anyone's job in five years, whose would it be?
- What's your most significant professional accomplishment so far in life?



2 - Personal interests

You don't want to be (nor should you be) your agents' best friend, but taking an active interest in who they are as humans goes a long way in understanding who they are as employees.

Here are some questions to help you do that naturally and non-invasively. Be prepared: Some agents will open up and tell you their life stories and possibly too much information (TMI!!), while others will tell you as little as possible. That's OK. The most important thing is that you're willing and trying to get to know them, which says something about you as a manager.



Personality

Understanding your agent's preferences, emotional make-up, and interaction style will help you determine the best ways to communicate with, recognize, and motivate your agents.

- Would you describe yourself as more of an introvert or extrovert?
- What's one adjective you'd use to describe yourself?
- How would your friends or family describe you?
- What's the kindest thing anyone's ever done for you? Why was it so special or important?
- What's the strangest compliment you've ever gotten?
- What's the last thing that made you laugh out loud, and why?
- How would you describe your sense of humor?



Hobbies

Often, agents have hobby-specific skills and talents they can apply to the contact center. Do they like to draw? Maybe they can design this year's customer holiday card. Do they sing? They might be a great candidate to emcee your upcoming kickoff meeting. Regardless, understanding their hobbies and interests will build rapport and trust.

- What's your favorite thing to do on the weekend?
- What's on your personal bucket list?
- What's the most exciting or adventurous thing you've ever done?
- If you had the rest of the day off, how would you spend it?
- What's your favorite vacation spot?
- What do you like to do for fun but don't have time for?
- What's your favorite movie genre?
- What's your all-time favorite book?
- What's your favorite band or musician?



3 - Communication and feedback preferences

Managerial research shows that a manager's feedback preferences impact how their direct reports rate them, and in 38% of cases studied, a manager's feedback approach detrimentally impacted the recipient. As such, we recommend that managers spend time understanding their **agent's** feedback and communication preferences rather than following their own natural tendency.



Communication

You won't get through to your agents if you're not on the same wavelength. Understanding your agents' communication preferences ensures you engage where and how they're most likely to listen.

- When you're out of the office, how do you prefer to communicate with people? Phone, text, email, etc?
- At work, how do you prefer to get information?
- How frequently and when do you check your work email? Your internal messaging platform? (i.e., Microsoft Teams, Slack, etc.)
- Which internal communication tools do you find easiest to use and retain information from?
- If we needed to reach you after working hours, what's your preferred communication channel?
- Which communication styles do you most identify with: no-nonsense and straight to the point, chatty and social, or a combination?



Managerial preferences

Each agent has different managerial preferences, from their manager's level of involvement—hands-off vs. micromanaged—to how they give feedback—straight and to the point or sugar-coated in positive reinforcement.

- How can I help you succeed in your role?
- How often do you expect to interact with me as your manager?
- Do you like your managers to check in on you daily, or do you prefer they leave you alone unless you need help?
- Think of the best manager you've ever had. What made them such a good manager? What did you like about their managerial style?
- How do you prefer to get performance feedback, and how frequently?
- Would you like more or less direction from me on your work?
- What would you like to know about me?



Recognition & rewards

Although recognition and rewards are always given with the best intentions, failing to understand your agents' preferences can lead to embarrassment or wasting valuable dollars on unwanted gifts.

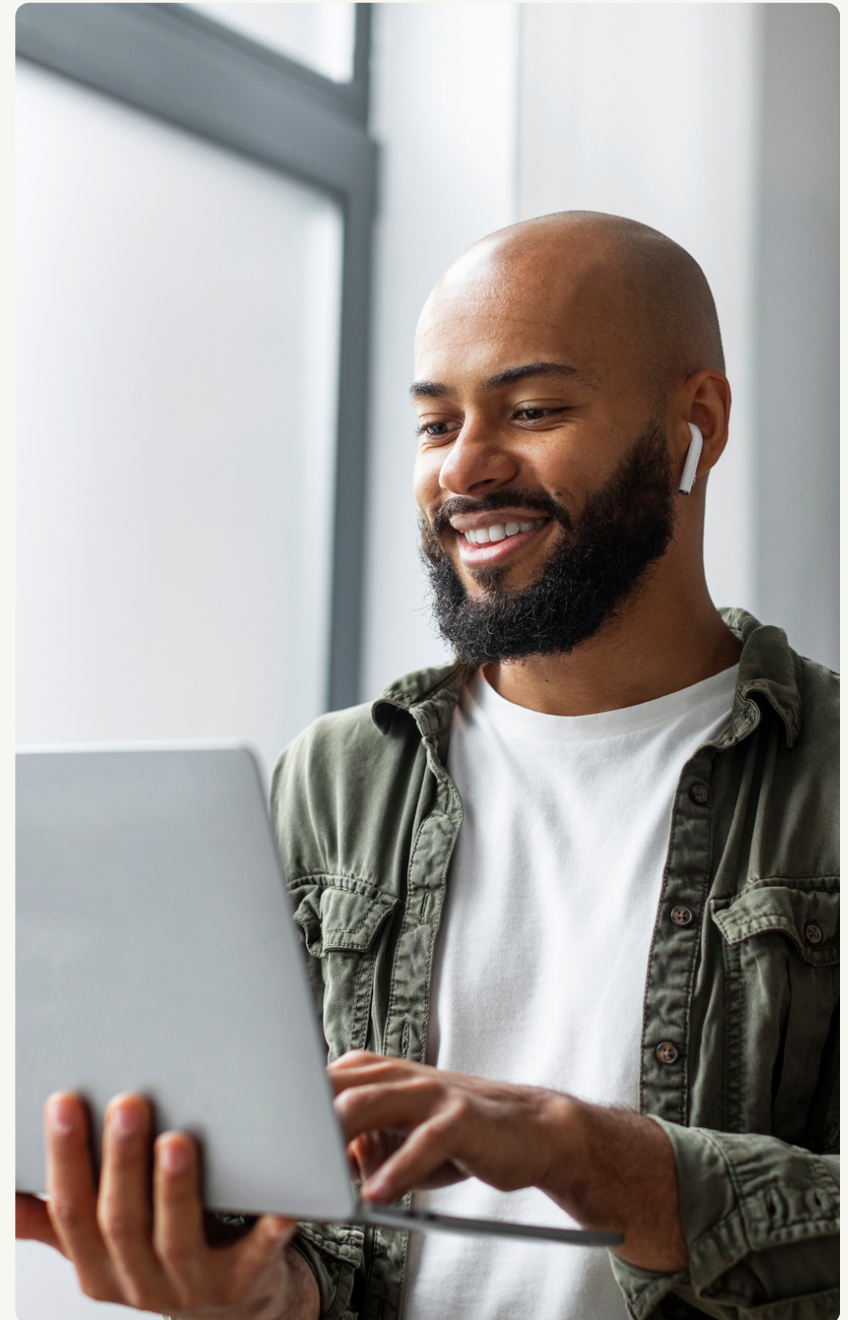
- What type of recognition do you prefer? Public, like verbal acknowledgment in a team meeting, or private?
- How often do you like to be recognized?
- Do you prefer recognition for individual or team achievements?
- What are your favorite rewards? Do you prefer monetary rewards, gifts, etc.?
- What's the best reward you've ever received at work?



4 - Well-being and happiness

An agent's overall well-being and happiness, both inside and outside the contact center, impacts their job performance. Understanding their state of mind—and if there's anything you or your HR team can do to help—will help you be a better manager.

- In an ideal world, how much time would you spend working virtually versus in the office?
- What's the best thing that happened to you this week?
- What has frustrated you this week?
- What's your commute like?
- How would you describe your peer relationships?
- How would you describe your work-life balance?
- What part of the day are you most productive?
- Is there anything related to work that keeps you up at night?
- When you feel stuck or frustrated, what is your process to get unstuck?
- Are any healthy habits or hobbies critical to your routine and well-being?
- How aware are you of the physical and mental well-being benefits our company offers?



5 - Company alignment

Today's employees care just as much about a company's mission and goals as they do about their role. According to [McKinsey](#) research, "when employees feel that their purpose is aligned with the organization's purpose, the [benefits expand](#) to include stronger employee engagement, heightened loyalty, and a greater willingness to recommend the company to others." So, talking with your agents about their perceptions and beliefs about the company's goals and culture can help you keep a pulse on engagement and share feedback with senior leaders to improve alignment.

- What do you like most about working for this company?
- How would you describe or rate our company's customer focus?
- You could be a contact center agent anywhere. Why do you stay here?
- What traits do you value most in company leaders?
- How would you describe the culture here?
- What aspects of our company culture would you change?
- How empowered do you feel to do your job?
- What tools or resources help you most in your daily work?
- How do you feel about the tools and technology that you use to do your job?
- What's one thing you would change about how our team works together?



Uplevel your coaching conversations with Sharpen

Coaching and developing your agents can undoubtedly be the most fulfilling yet challenging aspect of your role as a contact center supervisor or manager. But with deliberate 1:1 planning, a vested interest in your agents' success, and genuine curiosity, you can facilitate meaningful conversations that take your performance and engagement to the next level.

This is where Sharpen can help.

Use interactive and intuitive dashboards and reports to understand agent performance, empowering you with a data-backed baseline for your coaching conversations. Additionally, the Sharpen interface makes it easy for you to review customer interactions and give agents feedback in the manner that best aligns with their preferences.

The result will be more impactful 1:1s, more engaged and productive agents, and happier customers.

Meet with Sharpen



About Sharpen

As your partner in performance, productivity, and empowerment, Sharpen delivers better outcomes: better outcomes for customers, agents, and your business. Our contact center platform is intentionally designed and masterfully engineered for a seamless, intuitive experience across the board for a CX difference you can see—and feel.

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