

The Performance Conversation Reframe.

Why Performance Ratings Rarely Improve Performance.

Five reframes and a full conversation guide for leaders ready to shift from ranking to growth.

THE CONVERSATION REFRAME

The question shifts from 'How do we rank people fairly?' to 'How do we help people become more capable over time?' Here is what that sounds like in practice.

<p>THE SYSTEM ASKS</p> <p>"Where did they fall this year?"</p>	<p>ASK THIS INSTEAD</p> <p>"What has this person become capable of that they weren't before?"</p>
<p>THE SYSTEM ASKS</p> <p>"How do they compare to their peers?"</p>	<p>ASK THIS INSTEAD</p> <p>"What would help them grow most in the next six months?"</p>
<p>THE SYSTEM ASKS</p> <p>"What rating best reflects their performance?"</p>	<p>ASK THIS INSTEAD</p> <p>"What does success look like for them — and what is getting in the way?"</p>
<p>THE SYSTEM ASKS</p> <p>"Do they belong in the highest category?"</p>	<p>ASK THIS INSTEAD</p> <p>"Where has their contribution been most meaningful, and how do we build on that?"</p>
<p>THE SYSTEM ASKS</p> <p>"What do I need to document to justify this rating?"</p>	<p>ASK THIS INSTEAD</p> <p>"What honest thing do they need to hear that no one has said clearly yet?"</p>

THE SHIFT IN ONE SENTENCE

When performance discussions feel like judgment, people manage perception. When they feel like investment, people pursue mastery.

THE CONVERSATION GUIDE

Use these questions to structure a performance conversation that focuses on growth rather than placement.

OPEN — SET THE TONE

Start with what they see.

"What felt most meaningful in your work this year?"

Let them lead first. You learn more about engagement from what they choose to mention.

Name what you observed.

"Here is what I noticed about your contribution this year — especially in [specific moment]."

Be specific. Vague praise lands as hollow. Specific recognition lands as seen.

EXPLORE — GROWTH & GAPS

Get honest about the gaps.

"Where did you feel least effective — and what got in the way?"

This question only works if they trust you. If they deflect, the safety issue is the real conversation.

Name what they need to hear.

"The thing I want you to hear clearly is [honest observation]."

How does that land?"

The most useful feedback is the thing no one has said directly. Say it.

CLOSE — FORWARD FOCUS

Define growth together.

"What would you want to be more capable of in the next six months?"

Growth owned by the person moves faster than growth assigned to them.

Make one commitment each.

"Here is one thing I will do differently to support your development. What is one thing you will own?"

Shared accountability changes the dynamic from evaluation to partnership.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

When was the last performance conversation that truly helped someone grow?

Growth rarely happens inside simplification. It happens through dialogue.