

RETURN TO CAMPUS



People & Workplace Culture

Conversation Guide

For Supervisors



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INTRODUCTION

This conversation guide helps to prepare supervisors for conversations you may have with your employees as they prepare for returning to work.

- We recognize that it may not be easy to have these conversations, but they are essential to promoting a healthy dialog and safety and wellbeing of your team.
- The current climate is very unpredictable causing most of us to feel uncertain and uneasy. This guide is intended to assist with these conversations.

Our campus community is known for being a caring community. We hope this guide will provide helpful strategies and resources for you to communicate with your employees.

This conversation guide is organized into sections for ease of use:

1. Values
2. Resources for Starting the Conversation
3. Questions to Consider Asking
4. Guiding Principles for Our Work
5. Discussion Guide

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1. VALUES BASED CONVERSATION

Based on SLCC Values, consider the following as you prepare for your conversation:

COLLABORATION: Create a trusting and respectful environment.

COMMUNITY: Develop a cross-collaborative mindset.

INCLUSIVITY: Encourage and include diverse ways of thinking and practice.

LEARNING: Be open to transformative ideas. Educate yourself on the College response to:

Working Through COVID-19

INNOVATION: Foster conditions for creativity.

INTEGRITY: Create an open and honest environment.

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2. STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Sometimes just starting a difficult conversation can be challenging. Consider practicing questions and responses with trusted peers, Employee Relations, or mentors.

Make yourself available to employees via any method that works best. Ask them what is preferred.

Below are some resources and best practices to help you get started with the conversation:

Helpful Resources:

- **Active Listening**: Many people are stressed, anxious, fearful, etc. Listen for these considerations using active listening skills.
- **Identify Bias**: These can be from past experiences with the employee, assumptions of experiences, etc.
- **Assertive Communication**: [Communicating in Times of Change](#)
- **Leading Through Change**: [Compassionate Directness](#), [Crisis Communication](#), [Change Management Foundations](#), [Embracing Unexpected Change](#), [How to Manage Feeling Overwhelmed](#)
- **Telecommuting/Remote Work**
 - <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-news/pages/coronavirus-and-teleworking-tips-for-preparing-your-workforce.aspx>
 - <https://www.inc.com/christina-desmarais/get-more-done-18-tips-for-telecommuters.html>

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3. QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

We encourage supervisors and leaders to lead conversations with curiosity by asking open ended questions. Holding conversations in this way allows the employee to determine their own actions and allows you as the supervisor to help work with them on considering how they want to be accountable.

Resources:

[Asking Open-Ended Questions Helps New Managers Build Trust](#)

1. How are you feeling about returning to the workplace? (Asking this directly gives you a deeper understanding of what they are experiencing).
2. What do you envision returning to work looking like?
3. What concerns do you have?
4. Are there any additional materials, training, or equipment that you need to feel safe?
5. Would you like to continue working from home at this time? (Determine if this is possible before asking this).
6. Are there any obstacles that would need to be solved in order for you to return to the office?
7. Is there anything I, as your supervisor, can help you with?
8. Are there ways that our team as a whole could better support you?
9. Is there anything the College could do to better support our employees?
10. What's one process or practice that you'd like to see our team or department continue?
11. What's one process or practice that you'd like to see our team or organization revise or stop?
12. Tell me more... (use when they are making general statements, expressing feeling, or you have questions about what they are meaning).
13. What are you experiencing? (This can be used to learn more about what they are going through, learning more about what is going on in their lives and how you might be able to assist through the workplace).
14. That sounds challenging. (To use when they are expressing feelings or describing situations that are difficult).
15. What am I missing? How can I help you be successful at your job?

4. DESIGNING THE NEW NORMAL TOGETHER

As we think about transitioning back to campus, it is a good time to think about creating more innovative ways to work. This crisis has forced us to re-think the way we teach, conduct meetings, meet with students, and communicate.

Grounded in the work of our SLCC values, how can you begin to think about designing the new normal together with your teams?

What questions do you still have unanswered? What information will help you to be informed and ready for the conversation?

Flexible Work at SLCC

Flexible arrangements must be transparent, equitable and communicated to all. We encourage you to have a conversation with your employee to consider the options.

What options do I have?

- **Employee Works Four Days a Week-** Common example- 4/10 schedule (four 10-hour days per week)
- **Flextime-** this schedule allows for an employee to alter the starting and/or end time of their workday. Employees still work the same number of scheduled hours as they would under a traditional schedule.
- **Telecommuting-** Many offices and departments at SLCC have telecommuting arrangements in place. For more information on how to set up a mutually beneficial agreement between you and your employee, please refer to the [Telecommuting Toolkit](#).
- **Consider adopting best practices from the teleworking experience:**
 - **Reduced on-campus hours, increased telecommuting**
 - **Webex meetings, standard practice**
 - **Staggering on-campus shifts for coverage**
 - **Utilizing Teams, Sharepoint, and other software to increase collaboration from remote settings**

Contact: Marni Fisher for additional information.

5. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Working Through COVID

As we gradually transition back into our workplace environment/campus community, we would like to offer some principles for engaging in thoughtful dialog with your employees and teams.

- 1. “What do you need to be successful coming back to work?”** Start the conversation by ensuring it is coming from a place of caring and concern. Be prepared to address specific issues around health and safety. Also ask, **“What else are we missing from your perspective?”**
- 2. Change presents something different, something new.** Sometimes managing change can be challenging. The more effective an individual can navigate through transition, the more quickly the new normal will occur. We recognize there may be resistance and resentment towards the change.
- 3. Your personal physical, mental, and emotional health is far more important than anything else right now.** Finding ways to actively work on your physical, mental and emotional health is important right now. Whether it's at-home workouts, meditation or calm moments, stepping away from everything for even 5 minutes - your health (all of it) is the highest priority. Our phenomenal wellness team has offerings and online resources; please take time to take care of yourself and your family.
- 4. Please do not try to compensate for lost productivity by working longer hours.** We do not measure success by hours worked; keep doing your best. We trust you to do your best work and understand that there are days when your focus will need to be elsewhere.

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5. Please be kind to yourself and not judge how you are coping based on how you see others coping. You are a team of high performers - and likely are having moments or hours or days where you don't feel your best. That is okay - we will all have those times because we are human. Let yourself be human. Please ask for help if you need it. Please take the time you and your family need.

6. Please be kind to others and not judge how they are coping based on how you are coping. Let's not judge or compare ourselves with others. We are the people who are kind. We value the diversity of who we are - which means in the midst of a crisis or challenge - we cope differently. If you see someone struggling, go back to - *how can I help?* Our SLCC colleagues might feel a need for "permission" to be human. Please be supportive.

7. Your success and your team's success will not be measured the same way it was when things were normal. You are a team of professionals who are creative, innovative, resilient, and human. I believe it is our responsibility to create the conditions for success – and that success looks a little different right now - AND you are being successful. Be open to learning something new as we adjust to a new normal. We can be successful together.

8. We acknowledge the difficulty of making yet another adjustment that may involve some uncertainties. Information will be communicated to help employees as they need it. Things are changing rapidly. We are working extremely hard to keep up with all that is happening. We want to provide openness to learning about the new normal. We have a renewed commitment to our team, to your role and to the mission of the College.

Adapted from: [i] Berger, Warren. (2018). *The Book of Beautiful Questions*. [ii] Brown, Brené. (2018). *Dare to Lead*; and People & Workplace Culture

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Employee's Concern	Potential Roadblocks in the Discussion	Continued Roadblocks in the Discussion	Discussion Needs Consultation
<p>Safety</p>	<p>Supervisor discusses safety protocols for department to reinforce our concern for employee safety as #1 priority. Items such as cleaning schedules, mask requirements, staggered schedules, plexiglass barriers, face shields, etc.</p> <p>All Personal Protective Equipment will be supplied to you if your department requires it for you to perform your job.</p>	<p>1. If employee does not feel that the safety protocols are sufficient, ask for suggestions on what would make the employee feel comfortable. Investigate feasibility of employee's suggestion and implement if feasible.</p> <p>2. Employee is concerned about coworkers and students failing to follow protocols. Inform employee of signage plans, options to refuse to serve or work with someone who is not wearing a mask. Provide employee with options to contact you as the supervisor, when they are feeling uncomfortable. What is the best way to reach you?</p>	<p>1. Discuss other safety options with your leadership. Determine if there are other resources. Determine if there can be additional teleworking options.</p> <p>2. Contact Employee Relations to determine next steps including possible corrective action.</p>
<p>Concerns with health and/or high risk</p>	<p>Explore telework options or work-sharing if telework is not an option.</p>	<p>Work with your leadership to determine needs of your area for returning to campus. Is there flexibility? Are there tasks that high risk employees can do from home</p>	<p>Have Employee contact Jill Tew, Leave Coordinator, fml or ada accommodations if appropriate.</p>

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		and tasks that can be transferred to employees that can return to campus?	
Preference of working at home	Explain that working from home will be a part of the new plan for many areas, but there is still a need for face to face work to support students and employees who need it and who are unable or uncomfortable with telework. Have you provided the employee with all the devices, equipment and training necessary to successfully work remotely?	Plan time to meet and discuss options with the employee. Keep in mind principles of trust and flexibility. Is it possible for the team to do job rotations where certain days allow for remote work? Can the employee work one or two days a week remotely and still meet the department's needs? Is it possible to try out a plan in a pilot type of arrangement to see what is possible?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discuss with your leadership. 2. Contact Employee Relations if your requests for return to campus are reasonable, required by your leadership—and—the employee continues to show resistance.
General anxiety and stress about returning	Talk with your employee when you are free from distractions so that you can be present and listen. Ensure the employee knows how you will support them when they return to work and what resources are available to them if they are uncomfortable upon returning to work.	If you are concerned that the employee may need professional assistance, ask them to consider contacting one of the resources we provide at the College: Employee Assistance Program (EAP) information; Center for Health & Counseling; Employee Wellness Stress Management. Share online	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discuss with your leadership. Are there other options? Is Teleworking available? 2. Contact employee relations to discuss options and potentially corrective action. 3. Have employee contact Jill Tew if the concerns are related to a reason that may

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		resources and sessions offered by Staff and Faculty Development.	qualify for FML or ADA Accommodation.
Changing workload/duties	Some employees have an increased workload due to teleworking and new duties associated with the new normal. Determine what areas the employee can cut back on if workloads will increase upon return to campus. Make sure to account for time spent commuting. Include the employee in the decision-making process. Consider using the Work Sharing Program	Revisit the current job duties and expectations with the employee and identify options and support that could help the employee meet goals. Identify training opportunities if it is a training or skills-based concern. Suggest the coaching program through Staff Development.	Discuss with your leadership. Are there other areas within your division that need additional tasks to complete? Contact Employee Relations to determine next steps.

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