

SUPERVISOR COACHING CONVERSATION

Structured Debrief Model - Questions to Reveal Thinking, Build Learning & Improve Transfer

A structured debrief helps uncover why a decisions and actions made sense to the officer at the time.

The Supervisor's Job

A coaching conversation is not about giving the officer your answer. It is about helping the officer reveal, examine, and improve their own thinking and performance.

Ask yourself:

“Am I revealing their thinking, or trying to replace it with mine?”

This approach addresses the key points of the Transfer-First Learning Loop to train the ‘system’ that produced their actions.

1. START WITH THE STORY

Before evaluating the outcome, understand what the officer believed they were trying to accomplish. If the officer cannot explain their thinking and framework, this is where you continue to ask questions to develop their framework for the future.

Goals & Priorities

- What were you trying to accomplish?
- What was most important to you at that moment?
- What were you trying to protect, prevent, gain, or accomplish?
- How did you prioritize those goals?
- Why did that priority make sense to you at the time?
- Did your priorities change as the situation changed?
- If they changed, what caused you to change them?

Predictions

- What did you think was going to happen?
- What were you expecting the other person(s) to do?
- What did you think would happen if you did **nothing**?
- What did you expect to happen because of the action you chose?
- What surprised you?
- What prediction turned out to be wrong?
- What prediction turned out to be useful?

2. PERCEPTION & ATTENTION

What did you notice?

- What did you notice first?
- What did you notice next?
- What did you hear, see, feel, smell, or otherwise detect?
- Was there something important you **didn't notice until later**?
- What information changed your understanding of the situation?

Where was your attention?

- What were you paying attention to?
- Why was that important to you?
- What were you trying to determine?
- Was your attention ever captured?
- Did you intentionally shift your attention? Why?
- Was there a point when you were focused on something that was no longer important?
- What were you **not** looking/listening for that might have mattered?

Coaching Pull

Instead of: "You should have been watching ____."

Try: "What were you trying to determine when you were looking there?"

Then: "What information might you have been missing?"

3. SENSE-MAKING

What did it mean to you?

- What cues did you pick up?
- What did those cues mean to you?
- How did you interpret what was happening?
- What made you think that?
- What possibilities were you considering?
- At that point, what did you believe was happening?
- What did you believe the other person was going to do?
- What made that interpretation seem reasonable at the time?
- Was there information that supported your interpretation?
- Was there information that didn't fit your interpretation?

Hindsight

- What do you understand now that you didn't understand then?
- What information became available later?
- What changed your interpretation?
- How could you recognize that change earlier next time?

Important:

Do not automatically treat hindsight as evidence that the officer *should have known then* what they know now.

4. DECISION MAKING

Understand the decision before judging it.

- Tell me about the decision you made.
- What led you to that decision?
- What options did you see at the time?
- What other options did you consider?
- Why did you choose this one?
- What were the advantages of that option?
- What were the risks?
- What were you trying to avoid?
- What did you expect your decision to accomplish?
- What did you think would happen next?

After the decision

- Did the situation respond the way you expected?
- What told you that your decision was working?
- What told you that it wasn't?
- When did you realize the situation had changed?
- What did you do with that new information?

Develop adaptability

- If the same problem looked different next time, what principles would still apply?
- What might cause you to choose a different option?
- What would you want another officer to recognize before making this decision?

5. ACTION / EXECUTION

Separate the decision from the execution.

- What were you trying to do?
- What went as intended?
- What didn't?
- Did the action you took accomplish what you intended?
- Was the issue with **what you decided to do**, or **how you executed it**?
- What did you notice about your own performance?
- What changed once you started acting?
- Did you have to modify what you were doing?

When something goes wrong

Instead of: "Why did you do that?"

Try: **"Walk me through what was happening that led you to do that."**

Then: **"What were you trying to accomplish?"**

6. ERROR & SUCCESS DETECTION

Performance doesn't end when the action occurs.

Can the officer recognize whether it worked?

- How did you know it was working?
- How did you know it wasn't?
- What was the first indication that something had changed?
- What told you that you needed to adjust?
- Did you recognize the problem immediately or later?
- What could make that signal easier to recognize next time?
- What would "early detection" look like?
- What would you do differently once you detected it?

Success deserves the same examination to cement in good thinking and decisions.

- What went well?
- How do you know?
- Why did it work?
- Was there anything about the situation that made success easier?
- Would the same approach work if the situation looked different?
- What part of your performance would you want to deliberately repeat?

7. ADAPTATION & TRANSFER

Move beyond “What should you have done?”

Ask:

- What did you learn from this?
- What will you take into the next call?
- What would still apply if the situation changed?
- What would make this problem harder next time?
- What would make it easier?
- What is the **smallest change** that could make the biggest difference?
- How would you recognize this situation earlier next time?
- What principle or concept can you carry forward?
- How could you use this lesson somewhere completely different?

Transfer Question

“If the circumstances change, what part of what you learned today still helps you?”

8. THING & REASON

Never evaluate only the **Thing**. Ask about their thinking, the **Reason**.

The Thing

- What did you do?
- What happened?
- What was the outcome?

The Reason

- Why did you do it?
- What were you thinking?
- What were you trying to accomplish?
- What information were you acting on?
- What did you expect to happen?

Then connect them:

“Was the outcome good because the reasoning was good, or did you get a good outcome despite the reasoning?”

And:

“Was the outcome poor because the reasoning was poor, or was the reasoning sound but the execution/outcome poor?”

Good outcome ≠ necessarily good process.

Poor outcome ≠ necessarily poor thinking.

9. AAR — KEEP IT SIMPLE

Use these questions regularly, not just after major incidents.

Individual AAR

- 1. What went well?**
- 2. Why did it go well?**
- 3. What is one thing you want to work on next time?**
- 4. How will you work on it?**

Possible 5th powerful question: **What was the biggest risk you took and got away with?**

Follow-up

Don't automatically accept the first answer.

Ask:

“How do you know?”

“What made that work?”

“What would that look like if the situation changed?”

10. VIDEO AS A COACHING TOOL

Video should not only be used to find mistakes.

Use video to see thinking, decisions, attention, communication, and adaptation.

Before watching

- What were you trying to accomplish?
- What should I be watching for?
- Where do you think the important moment was?
- What are you most interested in seeing?

During the video

- Pause here. What were you thinking?
- What were you looking at?
- What were you trying to determine?
- What information did you have at this point?
- What did you believe was happening?
- What options did you see?
- What did you expect to happen next?

After the video

- What did you notice watching yourself that you didn't notice in the moment?
- What surprised you?
- What would you repeat?
- What would you change?
- Why?
- What would you want to see yourself do next time?
- What would make that more likely?

When there is an outcome issue

Don't begin with: "Here's what you did wrong."

Begin with:

"Walk me through what you saw, understood, and were trying to accomplish."

Then use the video to test the story.

11. COACHING IN THE MOMENT

Not every coaching conversation needs to be a formal debrief. Use small questions throughout the day.

Before

- What are you looking for?
- What's important here?
- What are you trying to accomplish?
- What might change your plan?

During

- What's important now?
- What are you seeing?
- What changed?
- What are you trying to determine?

After

- What happened?
- What did you expect?
- What surprised you?
- What worked?
- Why?
- What would you change?
- What carries forward?

12. WHEN YOU NEED TO PUSH

Pulling is not withholding necessary information.

There are times when the supervisor must provide direction, correct a safety issue, establish a legal/moral/ethical boundary, or clarify a performance standard.

This too can be done by 'Pulling' through the Thing and Reason framework.

"As we just established, there is no legal authority to do that, or, policy states otherwise."

13. BUILDING A DISTRIBUTED PERFORMANCE CULTURE

Performance development is not something that happens only during training.

Every conversation can contribute.

Supervisors, FTOs, trainers, peers, and officers all influence the performance culture.

Look for opportunities to ask:

- What did you notice?
- What were you trying to accomplish?
- Why did that make sense?
- What told you it was working?
- What told you it wasn't?
- What would you carry forward?
- What would you teach someone else?
- What could we learn from this?

The goal

A cultural change where both good outcomes and poor ones are reflected on, questioned and leveraged to cement in great thinking and actions and to modify for the future less desirable or faulty ones.

Not more answers from supervisors.

More people thinking, talking about, examining, and improving performance, every day.

THE SUPERVISOR'S QUICK CHECK

Before ending a coaching conversation, ask yourself:

Did I uncover the officer's thinking?

Did we examine both the Thing AND the Reason?

Did we identify what was important, not just what happened?

Did we identify what they can carry forward?

Did the officer identify the next improvement?

Did this conversation improve their ability to adapt next time?

Train the system that leads to action, not just the action.

Transfer is the destination, Adaptability is the skill.

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