

*"To listen well is as powerful a means of communication and influence as to talk well."* - John Marshall

Open and honest communication with team members is crucial when running a law firm. Whether it be a group meeting, or one-on-one meeting, effective communication is critical. When I have individual one-on-one meetings with team members, I do quarterly conversations as opposed to the dreaded review. Reviews are uncomfortable and awkward for everyone. No one ever likes administering them, or being subjected to them. Instead, the quarterly conversation is something I have been doing for nearly a year and find them to be productive and rewarding for both myself and my team. I was inspired to start doing them after reading the fantastic book *How to Be A Great Boss* written by Gino Wickman.

Quarterly conversations are a casual and relaxed back and forth dialogue between a manager and team member. They are a great opportunity to truly listen to the team member and to gain insight on how you can be a better leader, and how the team member can be further challenged and utilized. Here are some things to keep in mind when doing quarterly conversations:

Ask team members prior to the conversation to perform a written self-evaluation, scoring themselves in different categories on a scale of 1 - 5. The categories I use are work quality, productivity, enthusiasm, dependability, and communication. You may be surprised with how team members score themselves within these categories. I too perform my own written evaluation of the team member and score them using the same categories and scale. We then compare one another's evaluation and discuss them at the quarterly conversation.

After we review the evaluations, I will ask the team member a series of questions that aim to drill down to how they truly feel about their role, and how they are doing. These questions yield so much interesting information. Really and truly *listening* to the answers you get in this context is so important. Some of the questions I typically ask are: Do you feel your work

makes a difference? Do you feel challenged in your current role? How can we better utilize your skill set? What is a personal goal you want to accomplish in the next 6 to 12 months? I guarantee you that other employers do not take the time to do this and will make you stand out. The team member will appreciate you for taking the time to ask questions that show you truly care. Retaining great team members is crucial and this is a great way of reducing the likelihood of someone from leaving.

Having an actual back and forth conversation instead of a review is for me very helpful to help improve a team member's performance, while reminding them that I care about their success. If you are not already doing quarterly conversations, I encourage you go give them a try. They can be a true win/win for everyone.