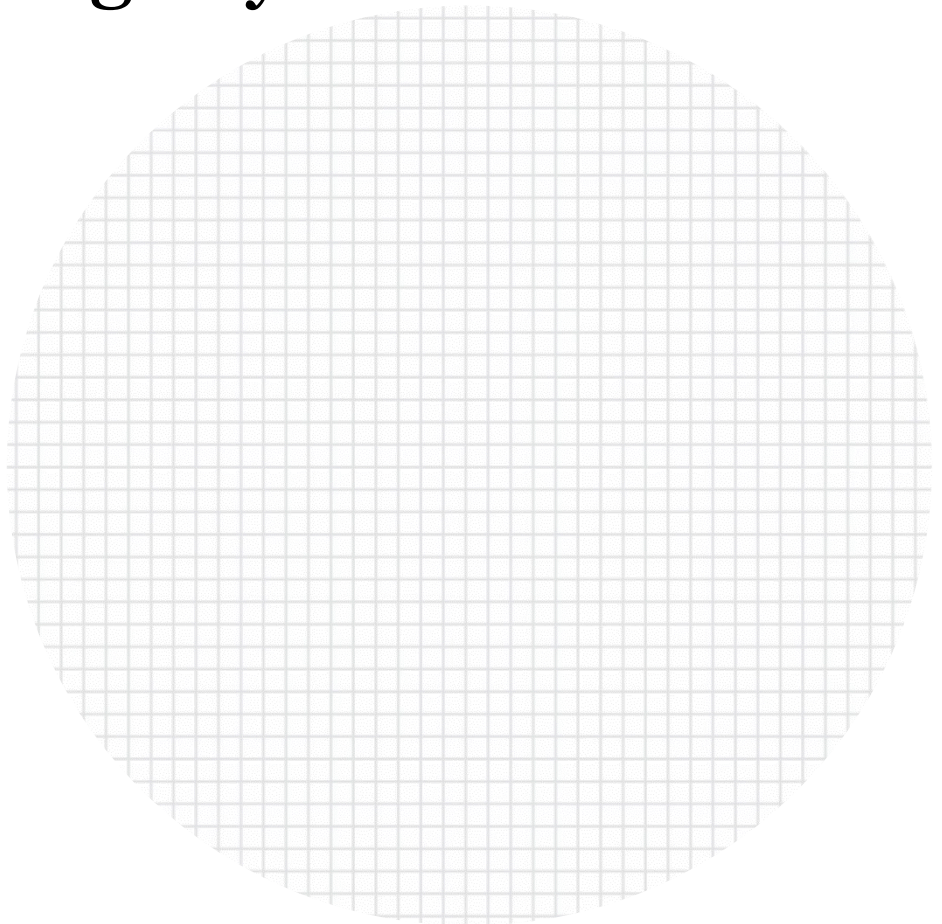




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# “What Matters to You?” Conversation Guide for Improving Joy in Work



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This resource is intended to help leaders guide conversations with colleagues about “What matters to you?” — Step 1 of the Four Steps for Leaders, described in detail in the IHI White Paper, *IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work*.<sup>1</sup> The content is derived from the “Listen to Understand” material.<sup>2</sup>

Before launching into Step 1, leaders need to establish a foundation for success. This includes preparing for the “What matters to you?” conversations. These are rich, learning conversations — not intended to communicate information, but rather to listen and learn. Leaders and colleagues should recognize this is a different approach than the usual “I tell you what isn’t working and you fix it” approach.

This guide helps leaders get started quickly with conducting effective “What matters to you?” conversations, learning as they go, and resolving issues that arise from such conversations.

## Purpose

To increase joy in work, senior and core leaders engage in effective, meaningful conversations with colleagues to understand:

- What matters to you in daily work?
- How to build on assets: What helps make a good day? When we are at our best, what does that look like?
- What gets in the way of a good day?

## Principles

- Ask the question, listen to the first response, and then allow for deeper reflection about initial comments. Be comfortable with silence; practice curiosity and inquiry to listen — not just to hear, but also to understand.
- You do not have to fix everything now — the intention of the conversation is listening to understand what matters, then working together using improvement science tools to address the things that get in the way of what matters.
- Ensure that this work is done with colleagues and team members — not to or for them.

**Step 1. Ask staff, “What matters to you?” — The purpose of the conversation**

Do	Don't	Steps to Try
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider asking a colleague who is a skilled facilitator to co-lead the conversations in team meetings</li> <li>• Talk about the <i>purpose</i> of the conversation — <i>why</i> you are interested in what matters to staff</li> <li>• Share a story about what matters to you and what makes a good day for you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assume you know what others are thinking or experiencing</li> <li>• Promise to fix everything</li> <li>• Do this as a one-time activity</li> <li>• Talk to just those who are positive and avoid the negative voices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose = Be able to articulate <i>why</i> you are talking about joy in work</li> <li>• Talk about your commitment to working together to make daily life better for everyone</li> <li>• Emphasize that this is about ongoing improvement, not a one-time or quick fix</li> <li>• Use brief huddles in the work area to have conversations with as many people as possible; this builds inclusiveness</li> </ul>

**Step 1. Ask staff, “What matters to you?” — Build on assets and “bright spots”**

Do	Don't	Steps to Try
<p>Ask staff members to share:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why I decided to work in health care</li> <li>• What makes me proud to work here</li> <li>• What matters to me in my work is...</li> <li>• What is the most meaningful or best part of my work</li> <li>• I know I make a difference when...</li> <li>• When we are at our best, it looks and feels like...</li> <li>• What makes a good day is...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assume all team members will understand what you're talking about immediately; they are often not used to being asked “What matters?”</li> <li>• Assume all will feel safe talking initially</li> <li>• Assume all have the same view</li> <li>• Mandate participation — instead, welcome and invite</li> <li>• Speak for others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose one question to get started, then listen and invite others to comment</li> <li>• Ask follow-up questions to clarify statements</li> <li>• Point out when bright spots are similar; identify the themes you hear</li> <li>• Capture what you are hearing so it is visible (e.g., on a whiteboard) and post the feedback in a location that's visible to all staff</li> </ul>

Step 2. Identify unique impediments to joy in work — The “pebbles in their shoes”		
Do	Don't	Steps to Try
<p>Ask members to share:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What gets in the way of what matters (the “pebbles in their shoes”) is...</li> <li>• What gets in the way of a good day is...</li> <li>• What frustrates me in my day is...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stay with general or broad comments (“never,” “always,” etc.)</li> <li>• Allow a single person to do all the talking</li> <li>• Assume people know you have heard them</li> <li>• Feel you need to immediately solve every issue identified</li> <li>• Think you need to do this all yourself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose one question to get started, then listen and invite others to comment</li> <li>• To move from broad comments (“always,” “never”), ask team members to be more specific, to identify some ideas you might test as a starting point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ “Help me understand what that looks like?”</li> <li>◦ “What happened yesterday that would be an example of that?”</li> <li>◦ Link to assets/bright spots: “What from our bright spots list would help us?”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• When one person is primarily talking, thank them for their comments and suggest, “Let’s hear from others on the team...”</li> <li>• Acknowledge what you’re hearing (e.g., “The thing that frustrates you is... did I get that right?”)</li> <li>• Capture what you are hearing so it is visible (e.g., on a whiteboard) and post the feedback in a location that’s visible to all staff</li> <li>• Use brainstorming tools to generate ideas for overcoming impediments</li> </ul>
Step 3. Commit to a systems approach to making joy in work a shared responsibility at all levels of the organization — Co-design next steps		
Do	Don't	Steps to Try
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List what the team identifies as bright spots and impediments</li> <li>• Ask, “What should we tackle first?”</li> <li>• Ask that all individuals participate in the local improvement work</li> <li>• Be specific about improvement (e.g., “We will develop our skills in improving this process starting tomorrow”)</li> <li>• Take immediate action with team members and ensure ongoing communication and follow-through</li> <li>• Ensure that patient and family advisors are part of care system changes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Judge, accept, or deny ideas</li> <li>• Take it all on yourself</li> <li>• Ask, then do nothing</li> <li>• Allow large gaps of time to occur between the initial conversation and follow-up conversations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage others and support creative thinking through the sharing of ideas</li> <li>• Use a short list of criteria to choose where to start — the issue...: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Is something we can do in our area right away, beginning small tests of change within 24 hours</li> <li>◦ Is an improvement that is a quick win</li> <li>◦ Is meaningful to several team members</li> <li>◦ Is one that team members are willing to test</li> </ul> </li> <li>• You or team members provide brief daily updates to the team</li> <li>• Patient and family advisors can be a source of energy for the team and reinforce why it’s important for team members to act on changes that impact what matters</li> </ul>

Step 4. Use improvement science to test approaches to improving joy in work in your organization		
Do	Don't	Steps to Try
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build on the previous three steps</li> <li>• Leaders role-model using improvement science (e.g., Model for Improvement; Lean) — improving <i>with</i> staff — as the organization strives to improve systems</li> <li>• Celebrate lessons learned — when a test fails, say “look what we learned from this” and keep testing</li> <li>• Begin to link the changes for joy in work to other improvements (e.g., how one improvement helps increase safety or efficiency)</li> <li>• View improvement as part of daily work, something that is an essential part of each person's role</li> <li>• Put systems in place to monitor changes, to ensure they are sustained or to signal a need for further improvement</li> <li>• Use change ideas from Appendix B to challenge the team to continue to aim high</li> <li>• Celebrate small wins</li> <li>• Experiment — understand which changes you test have the most impact and then expand on these</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to “fix it” by yourself as a leader</li> <li>• Try changes that are too big or too complex, or try to change everything at the same time</li> <li>• Assume you know the solution</li> <li>• View this work as a project</li> <li>• Assume that changes will be sustained</li> <li>• Move on to the “next thing”</li> <li>• Fail to develop a short-term and long-term measurement strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a clear aim — have individuals co-create the aim (achieve what, by when) so everyone knows the target/goal you are working toward</li> <li>• Ask for volunteers, especially those who have a passion for change, to help with improvement</li> <li>• Go small to go fast — use rapid, short PDSA cycles to test ideas (e.g., test one small change this afternoon, in one location); if you can't make progress quickly, try breaking the improvement into smaller parts</li> <li>• Build capacity — teach improvement science to team members as you do tests of change</li> <li>• Ensure patients and families are part of the improvement</li> <li>• Measure results — a combination of fast, short-term feedback and long-term feedback that includes process measures first, then outcome measures; share results; keep testing</li> <li>• Measure ongoing results to ensure sustained results</li> <li>• Ask “What's next?” and “What can we do even better?”</li> <li>• Provide regular recognition for the changes implemented and sustained over time</li> <li>• Remind team members of the progress made</li> </ul>

## References

1. Perlo J, Balik B, Swensen S, Kabcenell A, Landsman J, Feeley D. *IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work*. IHI White Paper. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Institute for Healthcare Improvement; 2017.  
<http://www.ihl.org/resources/Pages/IHIWhitePapers/Framework-Improving-Joy-in-Work.aspx>
2. Balik B, White K. *Listen to Understand: Conversation Guide*. June 2017.