

## VANTAGE POINT

### *Valued Conversations*

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***Valued Conversations*** are strategically planned and executed conversations effective executives initiate with their most valued direct reports and generally occur every two to three months. The goal is to demonstrate that you care about them, their life and their future, and to reinforce that you hold them in high regard. These conversations are NOT to be confused with monthly, semi-annual or annual performance reviews.

#### **Context:**

- Valued employees (high potential managers and high performing individual contributors) at all levels – especially senior levels – want/need periodic meaningful dialog with their boss. In fact, it is common knowledge that the most predictable reason valued employees stay with their current employer is their relationship with their immediate boss – and the opposite of that is also true.
- Valued conversations are critically essential – they are not necessarily natural (in all – YES, ALL – summary executive 360 data – the scores related to boss and direct report relationships are in the bottom quintile of executive effectiveness)
- Executives have understandable resistance to having these conversations:
  - The best executives have hired or promoted experts (5s/As) in the most important roles.
  - The executive may be uncomfortable with the technical aspects of the role of the direct report.
  - The executives are busy and they respect that the valued direct reports are just as busy. This is incorrect – all employees always have time to be engaged in a “valued conversation.”
- The executive is afraid that the conversation will degenerate to a discussion regarding compensation inflation and/or title inflation. (This rarely happens and when it does – the effective executive brings the conversation back to a structured process).
- What’s needed: (No interruptions – turn away from your computer and silence your phones)
  - A structured – BRIEF – process (The total elapsed time of the discussion is generally less than 30 minutes.)
  - Respect and regard – demonstrated value for the direct report’s thinking and opinions
  - The valued direct reports want frequency and quality – NOT duration or supervision
  - Quality inquiries
  - Active listening on the part of the executive
  - Positive suggestions on what to do or how to perform better to be more effective

## The Seven Questions of the Structured Process:

(You won't always ask all these questions and some or all may need to be modified for your specific organization or situation. You may also choose to ask some more personal questions.)

1. "Thanks for investing your time to talk with me. I'd like you to know some things I am thinking related to where I see the business (overall) and our function (BU, etc.) going." Now, make VERY brief and pertinent comments. Then ask "Where in your judgment might the organization be going?" Practice active listening.
2. "Where is your area of authority (BU, function, etc.) going?" Practice active listening.
3. "What's going particularly well in your area of responsibility?" Practice active listening.
4. "If you were your boss what suggestions would you have for yourself and your area of operations?" Practice active listening – then say, "Well thanks, I would like to offer a couple of thoughts related to your comments." Use this opportunity for alignment and communicating the direct report's broad range of executive support. Make your comments brief, pertinent and developmental!

5. "What can I do to be more effective with my support? What might I do more of or less of?" Practice active listening. Absorb what you hear and say as little as possible – making brief commitments where appropriate.
6. "I would like you to advise me on one or two things that, if I did them, you would experience me as more effective in our relationship." Practice active listening. Absorb what you hear and say as little as possible – briefly making commitments where appropriate (do not justify anything!). Listen and care.
7. "What do I not seem to know or what am I not asking that might be beneficial to your career or our relationship?" Practice active listening. Absorb what you hear and say as little as possible – making commitments where appropriate (do not justify anything!). Listen and care.

*(Some of these concepts were inspired from an article by Marshall Goldsmith published in Insights-Winter 2002)*



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### About Vantage Associates-West, Inc.

Vantage executive consultants work with members of senior leadership teams, individually and collectively, to optimize the results of strategic planning and execution to develop successful leaders who achieve and sustain industry leading performance in growth and profitability.

### Contact us to learn more.

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