



CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR MANAGERS

Words to use: scripts for leading, not doing

Word-for-word scripts to delegate a decision, coach instead of covering, and align your team, with planners to prepare each conversation.

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HOW TO USE THIS PDF

Type straight into the boxes on screen and save your copy, or print it and write by hand. Rating scales add up on their own in most PDF readers, including Adobe Acrobat and Chrome. Every heading above is a link.



START HERE

Why scripts work

Knowing what to say is half the battle. When the words are ready, the hard conversation happens this week instead of next quarter.

Most managers do not hold on to work because they want control. They hold on because handing it over cleanly takes words they have not practiced. These scripts give you a starting point. Say them once as written, then make them yours.

Delegate

Hand over a decision with clear ownership, limits and a check-in, so it does not boomerang back to you.

Coach

Answer a question with a question, so people build the skill instead of borrowing yours.

Align

Explain why a priority matters and surface concerns early, so buy-in replaces compliance.

ONE RULE FOR EVERY CONVERSATION

Leave with one clear action, one owner and one follow-up date. If any of the three is missing, the conversation is not finished yet.



SCRIPT 1

Delegate a decision

Delegation fails when the boundaries are vague. This script makes the outcome, the limits and the check-in explicit in under a minute.

THE DELEGATION SCRIPT

"You own **[the decision or outcome]**. You can decide **[the boundaries]**. Check in with me if **[the trigger]**. Let's review progress on **[the date]**. What support do you need to take this on?"

Blank	What to say	Example
The outcome	The result they own, not the tasks. Name what done looks like.	"You own the weekly staffing schedule, from draft to sending it out."
The boundaries	What they can decide alone: budget, scope, people, timing.	"You can move shifts and approve swaps within the current budget."
The trigger	The specific situation that needs you. Keep it short.	"Check in if a change affects overtime or a client commitment."
The date	When you will look at progress together, not approve each step.	"Let's review it together on the first Friday of next month."
The support	Ask, then stop talking. Their answer tells you what they need.	"What would help you feel ready to run this?"



WORKSHEET

Your decision-rights map

List recurring decisions that still land on your desk. For each, choose who owns it and set the guardrails, so delegation is clear without adding approval steps.

Recurring decision	Owner: me, team or shared	Boundaries and limits	Escalate when

Fill in your script

The decision or outcome they will own

Who will own it

Their boundaries

Check in with me if...

Review date

Support they asked for

WHO DECIDES, WHO ADVISES, WHO IS INFORMED

For any decision that is shared, name all three out loud. Most delegation confusion comes from people who thought they were deciding when they were only advising.



SCRIPT 2

Coach instead of covering

When someone brings you a problem, your fastest move is to solve it. Your best move is to ask first. Each question below builds the skill you would otherwise keep doing for them.

Start by asking what kind of help they want. "Would it help most if I coach you through this, make the call, or point you to a resource?" Sometimes the answer really is a decision, and that is fine.

1 Clarify

What outcome are you trying to achieve?

2 Explore

What have you tried so far? What options do you see?

3 Test

What evidence would help you choose?
What might you be missing?

4 Commit

What is your next step, and by when? What support would be useful from me?

Plan your next coaching conversation

Situation or challenge

The capability I want to build

Outcome I want from the conversation

Follow-up date

The questions I will use

Their next action

My support

After the conversation: a quick self-check

- ☐ I listened before advising.
- ☐ I asked whether they wanted coaching, a decision or a resource.
- ☐ My questions built their ownership, not my answer.
- ☐ We agreed a clear action and a follow-up date, and I did not step in when I did not need to.



SCRIPT 3

Align and earn buy-in

Authority gets compliance. Clarity gets commitment. Use this four-part message whenever priorities change, then surface concerns before they turn into resistance.

Your alignment message

Why this matters

What matters most right now

What changes

What stays the same

SURFACE CONCERNS

"Before we lock this in, what concerns do you have? What would need to be true for this to work for you?"

MAKE A SPECIFIC ASK

"Here's what I need from you: **[the action]** by **[the date]**. What would get in the way?"

Check that it landed

Within a week, ask three people to explain the priority in their own words. Where their answers differ, the message needs another pass, not the people.

Gaps I heard

What I will clarify, and how



TROUBLESHOOTING

When it gets hard

Even good scripts meet resistance. Here is what to say in the moments that usually pull managers back into doing the work themselves.

What happens	What to say	Why it works
They bring the decision back to you	"What would you decide if I weren't here? Walk me through it."	Returns ownership without leaving them stuck.
They make a call you would not have made	"Talk me through your thinking. What did you weigh?" Only step in if it breaks a boundary.	Protects ownership. Within the guardrails, different is not wrong.
"Just tell me what to do"	"I will if we need to. First, what is your best guess?"	Most people have an answer. They want permission to use it.
You are short on time	"I have five minutes. Bring me two options and your recommendation."	Coaching does not have to be long. It has to put the thinking on them.
Work stalls after you delegate	"What is blocking you? What would unblock it?"	A stall is a support signal, not proof you should take it back.

A conversation I have been putting off, and the first line I will say



NEXT STEPS

Keep going

Pick the next step that fits where you are.

Go deeper on your own: the Manager Workbook

All seven pillars of strategic leadership, the weekly rhythm, and scripts for the hard conversations, with worksheets you keep.

Practice on a real situation: 1:1 coaching

Bring the conversation you are dreading. Leave with a plan and the words to start it.

[Ask about the workbook](#)[Book a conversation](#)

More free guides for managers

- [The 7 pillars of strategic leadership: field guide and diagnostic](#)
- [A weekly habit beats an annual goal: leadership rhythm planner](#)

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