# 'What Matters to You?' Conversation Guide for Leaders

## Adapted from the IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work

The Framework for Improving Joy in Work is an evidence-based guide for overcoming burnout and empowering teams to improve their job satisfaction, created by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. The aim is to support healthcare organisations in engaging leaders to ask their teams, 'What matters to you?'. This enables leaders to better understand any barriers that teams have in experiencing Joy in Work and to be able to work with teams to create meaningful and relevant changes to address the issues.

Adapted from the original IHI framework, this resource is intended to support leaders within the veterinary sector in introducing the Joy in Work concept to their teams. The conversation guide will support you in setting up initial and continuing conversations with your team to identify any workplace frustrations, or 'pebbles in your shoes', and to engage and empower the team to identify potential solutions.

If you are new to Joy in Work, or need a refresh, the following resources provide further information:

- McCall, J. 2021. Restoring the joy post-COVID: the science behind thriving teams. *VBJ*. 223 (also available as a webinar and podcast).
- What Matters to You resources adapted and developed by RCVS Knowledge.
- 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.

## Purpose of this conversation guide

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

- What matters to them in their daily work
- How to build on and develop positivity: 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 of this conversation guide

- Ask the question, listen to the first response. The aim is not just to hear, but also to understand. Allow deeper reflection on any answers or comments. Active listening involves neither interrupting nor making suggestions at this stage.
- The aim is not to fix everything right now. The intention of the conversations is to understand what matters to the team, and then to work together to see how you can help good days occur more frequently.
- Ensure that this work is done *with* colleagues and team members — not *to* or *for* them

Use the following steps to help guide your conversations and plans within your team.

## Step 1: Ask the team, "What matters to you?" — The purpose of the conversation

Call a team meeting and encourage conversation. Follow the question tips below to identify the meaning and purpose behind why we do what we do. This step is about building trust with your team and creating bonds through shared values and purpose. Only listen; providing answers is for another time. Once you can identify what a 'good day' looks like for your team, you can then start to include more of these elements to help create more 'good days'. If you are in a large team, you may find it easier to split your team into groups, though do ensure that each group has a mix of roles in it.

| Do | Don't |
|---|---|
| Ask team members to share:<br>• Why I decided to work in my profession<br>• What makes me proud to work here<br>• What matters to me in my work is…<br>• What is the most meaningful or best part of my work?<br>• I know I make a difference when…<br>• When we are at our best, it looks and feels like…<br>• What makes a good day is… | • Assume you know what others are thinking or experiencing<br>• Promise to fix everything<br>• Do this as a one-time activity<br>• Talk only to those who are positive, and avoid the negative voices<br>• Assume all will feel safe talking initially<br>• Assume all have the same view<br>• Mandate participation — instead, welcome and invite<br>• Speak for others. |

### Steps to try

- Be able to explain *why* you are talking about joy in work.
- Talk about your commitment to working with the team to make daily life better for everyone.
- Explain that this is about ongoing improvement, not a one-time or quick fix.
- Ask follow-up questions.
- Point out when people have similar thoughts.
- Capture what you are hearing and place the feedback in a location that's visible to the whole team. Keep the feedback visible to allow other team members to contribute.

## Step 2: Identify what gets in the way of joy – The 'pebbles in your shoes'

This is about improving processes of work, not blaming individuals. Avoid providing solutions at this step.

| Do | Don't |
|---|---|
| Ask the team to share: <br><br>• What hinders them on a regular basis <br>• What gets in the way of what matters (the 'pebbles in your shoes') <br>• What gets in the way of a good day is... <br>• What frustrates me in my day is... | • Comment with general terms such as 'never', 'always' etc <br>• Allow one person to do all the talking <br>• Assume people know you have heard them <br>• Try to immediately solve every issue identified <br>• Think you need to do this all yourself |

### Steps to try

Choose one question to get started, then listen and invite others to comment. The following comments and tips may be helpful.

- "Help me understand what that looks like."
- "What happened yesterday that would be an example of that?"
- Link to positives: "What from our positive list would help us?"
- If one person is doing most of the talking, thank them for their comments and suggest, "Let's hear from others on the team..."
- Acknowledge what you're hearing (e.g. "The thing that frustrates you is... did I get that right?")
- 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 the whole team.
- Keep the feedback visible to allow further contributions, and to allow other team members to contribute.

## Step 3: Ways for the whole team to work together to remove the pebbles, create more good days and increase joy in work

This step should be completed after you have collected information from the entire team in Steps 1 and 2.

| Do | Don't |
|---|---|
| • Think holistically across the whole team and list what has been identified as pebbles, or positives<br>• Ask, "What should we tackle first?" and "What do you think will help?"<br>• Ask that all team members work towards improvement<br>• Be specific about improvement<br>• Take action with team members and ensure ongoing communication and follow-through<br>• Engage others and support creative thinking through the sharing of ideas<br>• Link ideas back to what the team cares about<br>• Ask for help when faced with a 'boulder'; a problem that's outside of the team's control. | • Judge, or deny ideas<br>• Take it all on yourself<br>• Do nothing<br>• Allow large periods of time to pass between the three steps<br>• Let leaders provide solutions when the team can solve the problem; let solutions come from the team. |

### Steps to try

- Use a short list of criteria to choose where to start — the issue…:
    - Is something we can do right away, testing change within 24 hours
    - Is an improvement that is a quick win
    - Is meaningful to several team members
    - Is one that team members are willing to test.
- Consider the client journey if you are making changes that may affect them.
- Provide brief daily updates to the team.
- Develop a method to capture pebbles and ideas for change going forward.

## Step 4: Build on the three previous steps and test your improvement approaches

Leaders should ensure that the whole team is involved. You can use Quality Improvement techniques to improve your processes. If you need a reminder about Quality Improvement techniques, watch Series 1 of the QI Boxset. As a team, develop a clear aim, indicating what you will achieve and by when, so that everyone knows what you are working towards.

| Do | Don't |
|---|---|
| • Celebrate lessons learned — if a change fails to provide an improvement, say "Look what we learned from this" and keep testing<br>• Link the changes for Joy in Work to other improvements (e.g. how one improvement helps increase safety or efficiency)<br>• View improvement as part of daily work, something that is an essential part of each person's role<br>• Put systems in place to monitor changes, e.g. audits<br>• Celebrate small wins<br>• Experiment — understand which changes you test have the most impact and then expand on these. | • Try to 'fix it' by yourself as a leader<br>• Try changes that are too big or too complex, or try to change everything at the same time<br>• Assume you know the solution<br>• Assume that changes will be sustained<br>• Move onto the 'next thing'<br>• Forget to measure whether the change you have made is an improvement. |

### Steps to try

- Ask for volunteers, especially those who have a passion for change, to help with improvement.
- Don't be afraid to make small changes quickly and test to see if they work; if you can't make progress quickly,
  try breaking the improvement into smaller parts.
- Ensure your team members have watched series 1 of the QI Boxset and understand Quality Improvement.
- Measure results — a combination of fast, short-term feedback and long-term feedback. Keep testing.
- Create a display in the practice to share progress and results with your team.
- Measure results on an ongoing basis.
- Ask "What's next?" and "What can we do even better?"
- Provide regular recognition for the changes implemented and sustained over time.
- Celebrate the progress made; you can always use these improvements to apply for the Knowledge Awards.

## References

Perlo, J. et al. (2017) *IHI White Papers: IHI framework for improving joy in work*. [Institute for Healthcare Improvement] [online].
Available from: http://www.ihi.org/resources/Pages/IHIWhitePapers/Framework-Improving-Joy-in-Work.aspx