

First 90 Days as a New Manager: 5 Conversations to Have

Build trust early and skip months of guessing

Most new managers are promoted because they were great at their job. Then they're handed a team with little guidance on how to lead it. In more than 20 years, from training new staff myself to developing leaders across healthcare and nonprofit settings, I've learned that the strongest managers aren't the ones with all the answers. They're the ones who have the right conversations early.

Have these five conversations in your first 90 days. Each one builds trust and saves you months of guessing.

WHEN: WEEK ONE

1. The Expectations Conversation (with your manager)

Why it matters: You can't lead well if you aren't sure what you're being measured on.

Ask:

- What does success look like for me and my team at 90 days, and at one year?
- What are the top two or three priorities you need me to focus on?
- How do you prefer I keep you updated, and how often?
- Where do you see the biggest opportunity, or the biggest risk, on this team?

WHEN: WEEKS ONE TO THREE, ONE-ON-ONE WITH EVERY PERSON

2. The Getting-to-Know-You Conversation (with each team member)

Why it matters: People work harder for a manager who knows them as people, not just job titles.

Ask:

- What do you enjoy most about your work? What drains you?
- What should I know about how you like to receive feedback and recognition?
- What's working well on this team that I should protect?
- If you were in my seat, what's the first thing you'd change?

Tip: Listen more than you talk. Take notes, and follow up on at least one thing they told you.

WHEN: AROUND DAY 30

3. The Working Agreements Conversation (with the whole team)

Why it matters: Unspoken expectations are the root of most team conflict.

Agree together on:

- How the team communicates, and which channel for what.
- How decisions get made, and who is involved.
- What happens when something goes wrong or a deadline slips.
- How the team will celebrate wins.

Tip: Write the agreements down and revisit them in 60 days.

WHEN: DAYS 30 TO 60

4. The First Feedback Conversation (with each team member)

Why it matters: If your first feedback is criticism, people brace for every meeting. Start with what's working so the harder conversations land better later.

Try this simple structure:

1. **What I noticed:** a specific action, not a personality trait.
2. **The impact:** why it mattered to the team, patients, or clients.
3. **What's next:** keep doing it, or one thing to try differently.

Tip: Then ask: "What feedback do you have for me?" and mean it.

WHEN: DAYS 60 TO 90

5. The Growth Conversation (with each team member)

Why it matters: People stay where they can see a future.

Ask:

- Where do you want to be in one to two years?
- What skills would you like to build?
- What kind of projects or responsibilities would stretch you?
- How can I support you?

Tip: Agree on one small development step and check in on it next month.

Your 90-Day Conversation Tracker

Conversation	With	Target week	Done
Expectations	My manager	Week 1	☐
Getting to know you	Each team member	Weeks 1-3	☐
Working agreements	Whole team	Weeks 4-5	☐
First feedback	Each team member	Weeks 5-8	☐
Growth	Each team member	Weeks 9-13	☐

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