STRATEGIC ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATIONS

What's one of the best ways to show someone you care about them? You spend time with them. When we spend time with our volunteers, we show them how much we care for them, value them, and want to help them grow. It's one of the reasons why we're such big believers in **meeting regularly with your volunteers one-on-one.** It's so important for you, your ministry, and each of your volunteers because these meetings give you the chance to evaluate how well your volunteers are doing in their roles. They also give your volunteers an opportunity to hear how you and your ministry can better help and equip volunteers to do their jobs better. Each of these conversations can play a critical role in your volunteer strategy. (If you don't have a strategy for your volunteers yet, feel free to steal ours!)

If we want to do a better job of equipping our volunteers and if we care about helping our volunteers do their jobs, we'll need to schedule time for one-on-one conversations throughout the year. While it's great just to get together and hang out, you can be strategic in approaching these conversations by **asking questions that allow you to evaluate your volunteer, allow your volunteer to evaluate *you,* or some combination of the two.**

TYPES OF CONVERSATIONS

We've found most conversations with volunteers fall into one of four categories.

- The **Onboarding** Conversation helps you learn about a new (or potential) volunteer as you fully integrate them into your volunteer team.
- The **Check-In** Conversation helps you connect with any volunteer on your team to give and receive feedback. It's probably the most common type of conversation you'll have.
- The **Troubleshooting** Conversation happens when you have to navigate those difficult moments when a volunteer isn't meeting your expectations or behaving in ways that concern you.
- The **Offboarding** Conversation is when you kindly and clearly remove a volunteer from your team when it's no longer the right fit.

You can't always anticipate when onboarding, troubleshooting, or offboarding conversations will happen, but you can schedule your check-in conversations in advance. We recommend meeting with every volunteer at least once a year (but twice is best), so you'll need to do some math to determine how many conversations you'll need to have each month.

HOW TO APPROACH EVERY CONVERSATION

Even though the type of conversation you have will affect the types of questions you ask and the way the conversation flows, there are a few elements to each conversation that remain consistent. If you've ever made plans to meet up with someone over coffee, then you're probably already an expert in how to approach each of these conversations.

When you're ready to plan a conversation with a volunteer...

- **INVITE:** Offer to buy them a meal or a cup of coffee. Let them know you'd love to hang out and hear about their volunteering experience.
- **PREP:** Before you begin a conversation with a volunteer, prepare by reviewing the open-ended questions you intend to use to guide the conversation.
- **WONDER:** Besides coming prepared with the right questions, it's also essential to come prepared with the right attitude. As you prepare for your conversation, adopt a posture of humility and curiosity. **Remember, this conversation isn't just about your volunteer. It's designed to help you understand some of your own weaknesses and potential areas of improvement.**

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- **PRAY:** Once you've prepared your questions (and your attitude), consider any specific questions, issues, or concerns you'd like to discuss with the volunteer you'll be meeting with, and spend time praying for that volunteer. Ask God to give you a posture of generosity, compassion, and understanding toward your volunteer.
- **GET FEEDBACK:** If you anticipate a difficult conversation with your volunteer, ask for feedback from a coworker or supervisor in advance. Then, develop a plan for addressing your concern with your volunteer in a way that assumes the best about them.

When you're finally sitting down with your volunteer...

- **CATCH UP:** Be sure to always start your conversations with your volunteers by catching up with them personally. Remember, you're not just a pastor to kids or teenagers—you're also the pastor of your volunteers. After you've caught up, ask your volunteer the open-ended questions you've prepared.
- **ASK FOR FEEDBACK:** Find out what they feel is working well and encourage them to share positive stories. Next, ask specific questions about how they're doing at fulfilling their roles and expectations so you can evaluate their progress. And third, ask questions that invite them to evaluate you and your ministry.
- **ASK IF YOU CAN GIVE FEEDBACK:** If you have any feedback you'd like to give your volunteer (especially if it's difficult to hear), be sure to ask if you can give them some feedback first. If they're not ready to have a difficult conversation, that's okay—ask them when would be a good time to have that conversation or share that feedback.
- **FOLLOW-UP:** After your conversation, follow up with your volunteer with a quick text thanking them for their time. If you had a challenging conversation, be sure to follow up with them about that as well.

Spending one-on-one time with your volunteers might feel intimidating, but it doesn't have to! With a little planning before your conversation, you can strategically spend time with and minister to your team of volunteers!

And, if you're using Grow Curriculum, we've already done the work to make these conversations easier for you! In Grow Kids and Grow Students Curriculum, we've created Conversation Guides with everything you need—PDFs and editable documents of questions and templates — to help walk you through each of the four conversations.



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