

Your Tough Conversation Script Pack

Poor performance

Sample script pack - fictional example

This sample uses fictional details. Your script pack will be generated from the situation you provide.

PREPARED FOR

Direct report

TO NE

Supportive and clear

SITUATION TYPE

Poor performance

Your 60-Second Prep Card

- GOAL** Move from vague concern to clear expectations, support, and next steps.
- OPENING LINE** "I want to talk about the gap I am seeing between the expectation and what has happened over the past month."
- ANCHOR PHRASE** "My goal is to be clear about the expectation and make sure you know what support is available."
- DO NOT SAY** "You need to do better."
- CLOSE WITH** "Let us agree on what changes from here and how we will check progress."

Situation Summary

A manager needs to address inconsistent work over the past month. The employee missed two internal deadlines, created rework for the team, and did not communicate early when behind.

OBSERVABLE FACTS / PLACEHOLDERS

- Inconsistent work over the past month
- Two missed internal deadlines
- Rework created for the team
- No early communication when work was behind

MISSING FACTS TO FILL IN

- Names of the specific deliverables
- Exact deadline dates
- Progress check cadence

Conversation Goal

Move from vague concern to clear expectations, support, and next steps.

Full Conversation Script

1. Set the purpose

"I want to talk about performance expectations and what needs to change. This is a coaching conversation, and I want it to be clear and useful."

2. Describe the pattern

"Over the past month, I have seen inconsistent work, including two missed internal deadlines and work that needed rework from the team. I also did not get early communication when the work started falling behind."

3. Explain the impact

"The impact is that the team has to adjust late, deadlines become harder to protect, and other people spend time fixing work that should have been ready."

4. Reset the expectation

"The expectation is that assigned work is completed by the agreed internal deadline, or that you communicate early when there is a risk of missing it. If quality is not where it needs to be, I need you to ask for help before the deadline is at risk."

5. Ask for context

"What is getting in the way of meeting the deadline and quality expectations right now?"

6. Offer support

"Based on what you shared, we can identify support. That might include clearer milestones, earlier review points, or help prioritizing. Support does not change the expectation that you communicate early."

7. Agree on next step

"For the next cycle, I want a progress update before the internal deadline and an early note if anything is at risk. We will check progress together after the next deliverable."

Tone Options

SOFTER VERSION

I want to make sure this conversation is useful, not discouraging. I am bringing this up because I believe the expectation can be met, and I want us to be clear about what has to change.

MORE DIRECT VERSION

The current pattern is not meeting expectations. The missed deadlines, rework, and lack of early communication need to change immediately.

CAREFUL / PROFESSIONAL VERSION

This conversation is to clarify performance expectations, discuss recent examples, identify support, and confirm the next steps for improvement.

Expectation Reset

What changed

“The change I need is earlier communication and more consistent follow-through on internal deadlines.”

Names the behavior shift.

The standard

“The standard is completed work by the internal deadline, or early communication when a deadline or quality risk appears.”

Defines success in observable terms.

Support available

“Support can include earlier check-ins, help prioritizing, or a review point before the deadline. Tell me which support would make the biggest difference.”

Offers support without lowering the bar.

If it is not sustained

“If this pattern continues, we will need to discuss a more formal next step. My goal is to address it before that is necessary.”

Keeps consequence language careful.

Progress check

“Let us check progress after the next deliverable so the expectation does not stay vague.”

Creates a clear follow-up point.

Questions to Ask

- What is getting in the way right now?
- Where do you need clarity from me?
- What would help you communicate earlier when work is at risk?
- What will you do differently before the next internal deadline?

Follow-Up Messages

SUBJECT

Recap from today

Thanks for meeting today. We discussed the performance pattern from the past month: two missed internal deadlines, rework needed by the team, and the need for earlier communication when work is at risk. The expectation going forward is completed work by the internal deadline or early communication if the deadline or quality is at risk. We agreed to use an earlier progress check before the next deliverable.

SUBJECT

Follow-up: performance expectations and next steps

This note recaps our conversation about recent performance expectations. We reviewed inconsistent work over the past month, including two missed internal deadlines, rework created for the team, and lack of early communication when work was behind. We clarified the expectation for timely completion, early escalation, and quality checks before work is due. We also discussed support options and agreed to a progress check before the next internal deadline.

Documentation Note

Met with the employee to discuss recent performance concerns. Reviewed inconsistent work over the past month, including two missed internal deadlines, rework needed by the team, and lack of early communication when work was behind. Clarified expectations for meeting internal deadlines, communicating early when at risk, and using support before quality or timing issues escalate. Discussed support options and agreed on an earlier progress check before the next deliverable.

DO NOT DOCUMENT

- Do not write "lazy" or "not trying."
- Do not add performance metrics that were not discussed.
- Do not imply a formal discipline outcome unless that process has already been confirmed.

What Not to Say / Say This Instead

Avoid saying

Say this instead

You need to do better.	The expectation is completed work by the internal deadline or early communication when there is a risk.
You are becoming unreliable.	The recent pattern has included missed internal deadlines and rework, which creates risk for the team.
I do not want excuses.	I want to understand what got in the way, and then we need to agree on what changes next.

Final Checklist

BEFORE THE CONVERSATION

- Bring the specific examples from the fictional scenario.
- Define the expectation in one sentence.
- Decide what support options are realistic.

DURING THE CONVERSATION

- Separate context from accountability.
- Ask what is getting in the way.
- Confirm the next check-in.

AFTER THE CONVERSATION

- Send a recap email.
- Document observable facts only.
- Follow up after the next deliverable.

Guardrail Reminder

REMINDER

This script pack helps you prepare clear workplace language. It does not replace HR, legal counsel, or company policy.

PAUSE AND INVOLVE HR OR THE APPROPRIATE INTERNAL RESOURCE IF THE EMPLOYEE MENTIONS

- Discrimination, retaliation, harassment, accommodation, medical leave, pay, termination, or a formal discipline process

PAUSE PHRASE

“I want to pause here and make sure we follow the right internal process before continuing.”