Conversational Moves to Master

These statements and questions are designed to provide an effective way of responding to routine situations. Learn to identify these situations and practice using these responses.

- **Thank you. I appreciate being told.** It's important to acknowledge that you've heard someone's criticism or feedback without getting defensive or trying to explain your behavior. Acknowledging that you've heard what was said doesn't mean you are agreeing with it.

- **Here's what I'm taking away from our conversation.** This is one of the most powerful ways to acknowledge others—by letting them know what you value you received in being with them or from what they said. It also validates their contributions to the meeting or conversation. This is also very rare, so most people will appreciate it.

- **May I tell you something?** This not only secures permission, it prepares people to hear what you have to say, and it usually makes your tone of voice supportive—requesting rather than confronting.

- **Where are you with this?** Asking people what they are thinking or feeling about an issue gives them a chance to express whatever might be on their minds. This is a key conversational move in achieving alignment.

- **While I would have preferred a different approach, I'll fully support this.** It's easy to back an idea that matches your own preferences. Part of being an effective team member or family member is the ability to get behind ideas or decisions that are not your favorites.

- **This is what I appreciate about you.** People want to be liked; they want to have an impact. Letting them know what you like about them as a person is perhaps outside your comfort zone. Since people don't often express this kind of appreciation, it has an impact.

- **Tell me about...** Checking in with people about their experiences is a lost art. Doing so makes them feel included, valued, and appreciated. This phrase is also a way to ask people to say more in a conversation when you would like to hear more from them.

Observations and Insights

- **Did I answer your question?** It's easy to misinterpret someone's question. Or when you are trying to be concise, the question might not get fully answered. Asking this question is a simple, courteous way to ensure that your replies are effective.

- **Please say a bit more about what you are asking.** In addition to clarity, you will gain a better sense of the context for the question if you ask them to say more before you respond.

- **I have a request.** This lets people know that you are about to ask for something specific. It's a better option than hinting or asking indirectly, then being disappointed when you don't get what you want.

- **What is your request?** Behind every complaint is something people could ask for that would resolve the complaint. After listening fully, giving them a chance to "empty out" about their complaint. This question is the next step: asking them what would take care of their concern.

- **I'd be willing to do this for you.** Making a request is one way to create an action or a commitment. Making an offer is another way. Good team members and family members make offers to do things for others without being asked.

- **This is the value I see in what you are suggesting.** Rather than jumping into a conversation by saying that something won't work, try first looking for the value in an idea and then expressing your concern.

- **What else?** This is the equivalent of saying "Keep talking." Asking "Anything else?" is checking one last time for comments.

- **I'm not going to do anything with this. Is that OK?** People leave conversations expecting that you will do something simply because it was discussed. If you don't want this to happen, clarify what you will or will not do as you wrap up the conversation.

Observations & Ideas

- **By when will you do that?** Asking for a specific commitment in time is an essential practice in project management. Any time you are concerned that something will not get done in a timely manner, make a point to nail down the "by when."

- **What would you like from me in this conversation?** Sometimes people come to you and begin discussing a topic without indicating what they are looking for in terms of your responses or in terms of outcomes. Consequently, it's difficult to know how to listen or participate. Asking them in the beginning will make the conversation more likely to turn out for both parties.

- **I think I'm clear about your idea, and I see it differently. May I tell you?** This is a way to set up your comments when you intend to disagree with what has been said. It both changes your tone of voice and makes it easier for them to hear your view. This phrase tends to take the right/wrong experience out of a conversation.

Observations & Ideas