

UW Medicine Leadership Job Aid

High – Solid – Low Conversations

The purpose of this job aid is twofold:

1. To prepare leaders on how to conduct *High-Solid-Low (HSL) conversations
2. To assist supervisors of these leaders in conducting coaching sessions on the strategies and nuances of having these conversations

**Official Name: highmiddlelow®, The Studer Group*

It is expected that the supervisor of each leader meet with them to provide coaching, offer examples, and share their own experiences conducting the HSL conversations. This job aid will serve as a guide for having these coaching sessions and will also highlight specific areas the supervisor should emphasize.

Additional resources will be listed at the end of this job aid.

Overview

As part of Patients Are First, all UW Medicine leaders are expected to conduct HSL conversations with all leaders who are on the Leader Evaluation Manager tool (LEM) and their professional staff direct reports. This is a key strategy shared by our Studer Group partners and has been shown to be highly effective in communicating with staff about their performance and your expectations of them as a leader. These conversations should be held once a year (not at the same time as your performance evaluations).

HSL conversations are currently being cascaded throughout UW Medicine as follows:

Timeline (2012)	Action
January - May	Associate Administrators conduct HSL conversations with all leaders on the LEM
May - August	Leaders on the LEM conduct HSL conversations with Professional Staff direct reports

The High-Solid-Low Conversations

The following provides a description of each of the three performance groupings:

High Performers

- Purpose: re-recruit and retain
- Tell them where the organization is going
- Thank them for their work
- Outline why they are so important
- Ask if there is anything you can do for them

Solid Performers

- Purpose: retain and develop
- Reassure them that the goal is to retain them
- Support: describe their good qualities
- Coach: cover development opportunities
- Support: reaffirm good qualities

Low Performers

- Purpose: up or out
- Do not start the meeting on a positive note (yet maintain a respectful tone)
- Use DESK
 - D - Describe exactly what has been observed
 - E - Evaluate how their performance impacts the workplace, and how you as their manager, feel about their performance
 - S - Show them what needs to be done
 - K - Know consequences of continued same performance

Learning From Others, Sharing Experiences

Tap into the experiences of other leaders who have conducted HSL conversations, including:

- Your direct supervisor
- Peers
- Other leaders you have a relationship with

Questions to consider asking:

1. How did you prepare?
2. Did you encounter any surprises or unexpected reactions during these conversations? If so, how did you respond?
3. What did you learn about yourself as a result of having these conversations?
4. If you could offer only one piece of advice, what would it be?

Resources, Tools

Multiple resources currently exist to further assist you with this process:

Patients Are First website: <https://depts.washington.edu/pts1st/>

Go to the **Leadership Development** tab; the January 2012 LDI has content specific to HSL, including:

- Education content from LDI
- HSL Differentiating Criteria (included as attachment to this job aid)
- HSL Tracking Log
- Summary of the purpose of the HSL conversations and explanations of each category
- HSL FAQs (included as attachment to this job aid)

Highmiddlelow® video series on the Studer Group website (login required):

http://www.studergroup.com/learning_lab/training_tools.dot

Practice

You may find it helpful to first practice having the HSL conversations to fully prepare yourself for the experience. Strategies to assist with practicing:

- Ask your supervisor or a peer to role play the three levels of performance
- Ask a peer to be a sounding board as you outline how you intend to conduct the conversation

Follow-up

After conducting your first conversation, meet with your supervisor and debrief how it went; the following process is recommended:

1. Specifically address three questions:
 - a. What went well?
 - b. What (if anything) did not go well?
 - c. What would you do differently next time?
2. Conduct another conversation and incorporate any changes from the debrief; check in at least one more time with your supervisor
3. Complete the HSL Tracking Log and share with your supervisor

Attachments

1. High-Solid-Low FAQs
2. Criteria for Differentiating High-Solid-Low Performers

Criteria for Differentiating High-Solid-Low Leaders

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How long will these conversations take?

These conversations should take around 15-30 minutes. The key is to complete these conversations for all employees and take the necessary time to do so.

2. Do I have to have the conversations in the exact order of high-solid-low?

We strongly suggest that you attempt to do so. By speaking with the high performers first you are building an emotional bank account with them. The low performers will want to create anxiety that this is not a good process. You must create that gap between the high, solid performers and the low performers.

3. I have a lot of follow-up meetings. Can I really get this done?

Yes. Many of the follow-up conversations for solid or high performers could be provided while rounding on employees. In fact, if rounding on staff is a key leadership skill, as it should be, you should have good opportunity to complete follow-ups. It is important that employees know that these conversations were not a one-off task to check the box but part of a meaningful dialogue.

Finally, by setting a date you are hardwiring that the follow-up will happen. It is suggested that if there is a follow-up date for solid performers, you ask them to ensure that it happens. An important goal for the solid performer is to help them develop. If you don't follow-up you are saying it is not important.

4. What if a person has years of "meets expectation" evaluations?

Begin the process now. Don't focus on what you didn't do in the past. Look at current behavior. Consult with HR and be up-front on the situation and what you did and did not do in the past.

5. How does this fit with the staff evaluation process?

The staff evaluation process is a formal review of the accomplishments, behaviors, and competencies of staff that occurs once a year. Research has shown that employees desire feedback more than just once a year. These two processes support each other.

6. How often do I repeat this process? Once a year?

Looking at employee retention research, employees like professional feedback at least every six months. The high-solid-low conversations complement the once-a-year evaluation and hardwire a connection with staff at least every six months. Many organizations have chosen to do this once a year in between annual evaluations.

7. How does this fit with the rounding I am doing? Do I use the high-solid-low on my rounding log?

Yes! In fact, it will enhance your rounding skill set. Rounding is the number one leadership practice to engage staff. The high-solid-low is an extremely important tool to make sure you are customizing your rounding interaction with each staff member. Think of rounding as the platform of your leadership skills and high-solid-low as a key feedback tool to use off of this platform. Once you complete the high-solid-low assessment and conversations for the first time, keep a rounding log with staff names with their high-solid-low assessment. As you engage with them in rounding, think about where they are in the performance curve of your department. Are you customizing your interaction appropriately?

8. Do I need to tell anything to my staff about these conversations?

Yes. You can share that you are meeting with each staff member individually. Tell them you want to be a better leader at giving feedback and that you are having one-on-one conversations with each staff member as part of their professional development. Remember, the *best communication* you can do is to have the conversations.

9. Should I tell my employees what group they are in?

You can if you wish. More importantly, by having these conversations you are being open to every staff member about their performance. The key to each conversation is not in telling them “what” group they are in but in the content of your observations, feedback, and questions for them. This is why preparing for these conversations is important.

10. What if I’ve already counseled a low performer on making specific behavior changes and the low performer didn’t change anything?

You should move to the next step of the disciplinary process in your organization. Check with HR on what process to use.

11. How can I manage up solid performers as an important asset to the organization?

First, remember how important they are to the organization. Almost anyone in their career will experience different successes. A traditional high performer may find themselves as a solid performer because they have taken on a new task or job. The key is not that you are a high or solid performer at any point in time; rather, it is that you are continually improving. Remember, you

would hire this person again, and you are in essence trying to recruit and develop both the high and solid performers.

Should I tell a solid performer all the things he or she is doing wrong?

No, research shows that you need three compliments to one criticism to have a positive relationship. This is why we use the structure of these conversations:

- I want to retain you (positive)
- Support (positive)
- Coach (develop)
- Support (positive)

12. Do we ever tell the solids that they have moved up to highs?

Yes. Most importantly, an employee should be told he or she is improving and how. A skilled manager is constantly recognizing the development of employees.

13. I need help with low performers. One or two employees are in disciplinary process now. What do I do with them?

Continue with those who are in the disciplinary process. If you have questions about certain low performers, seek advice or help from HR. Most importantly, remember to document your discussions and follow through with your action plan.

14. What if I have an evaluation for a staff member coming up soon?

Still complete the assessment of staff (high-solid-low). Make sure your evaluation is consistent with your assessment. While completing the evaluation, you can share the desired feedback and mark on the log the date you had the conversation.

15. Why are we rating people?

We are not rating people but providing professional development based on their specific situation. Remember, the goal is to move organizational performance by moving individual performance and to provide specific feedback to staff, the vast majority of which is to telling them how much we value them and why.

16. People want to know how I have rated them. What do I say?

Tell them, and then tell them why.

Criteria for Differentiating High-Solid-Low Leaders

	High	Solid	Low
Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Role models Service Culture Guidelines ▪ Accepts responsibility – does not blame, make excuses or shift responsibility ▪ Is fully accountable for every choice made ▪ Manages up – keeps leader informed and ensures there are no surprises ▪ Leads by example and mentors others ▪ Consistently makes tough decisions ▪ Challenges others to enhance knowledge and take skill sets to the next level ▪ Honors commitments to colleagues and those we serve ▪ Holds accountable those who are not modeling Service Culture Guidelines ▪ Is a role model in professional interactions and respect towards supervisor, peers, direct reports, faculty and staff consistent with the UW Medicine policy on Professional Conduct ▪ Ensures that all direct reports are consistently modeling the UW Medicine policy on Professional Conduct ▪ Is fully accountable to others for supporting shared goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Follows Service Culture Guidelines ▪ Accepts responsibility – occasionally makes excuses ▪ Occasionally steps forward to challenge peers' thinking to improve team or system performance ▪ Responds within expected and reasonable timeframe ▪ Manages up – keeps leader informed but with occasional surprises ▪ Meets all expectations but does not consistently serve as an effective role model ▪ Periodically needs coaching to make tough decisions ▪ Conducts self in a professional manner consistent with the UW Medicine policy on Professional Conduct ▪ Demonstrates initiative and intrinsic motivation ▪ Usually accountable to others for supporting shared goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engages in behaviors inconsistent with the Service Culture Guidelines ▪ Makes excuses to rationalize lack of results instead of accepting responsibility ▪ Resists peer and/or team member input and feedback ▪ Complacent about achieving goals and does not demonstrate a sense of urgency when goals are not being met ▪ Inconsistently meets deadlines ▪ Lacks focus and follow through on top priorities and long-term plans ▪ Avoids making tough decisions ▪ Requires significant coaching and support ▪ Follows rather than leads ▪ Uses a we/they framework that is ineffective for problem solving ▪ Engages in behaviors inconsistent with the UW Medicine policy on Professional Conduct

Criteria for Differentiating High-Solid-Low Leaders

<p>Must Have Behaviors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consistently rounds on staff and/or patients and always follows up on information and requests gathered ▪ When appropriate, consistently uses AIDET and ensures that all direct reports consistently use AIDET ▪ Consistently uses Supervisory Meeting Model with all direct reports and ensures that model is used by all leaders in their department ▪ Consistently rewards and recognizes staff ▪ Is 100% compliant with all LEM and Linkage Grid Requirements and ensures that all direct reports are 100% compliant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consistently rounds on staff and/or patients and usually follows up on information and requests gathered ▪ When appropriate, consistently uses AIDET ▪ Consistently uses Supervisory Meeting Model with all direct reports ▪ Periodically rewards and recognizes staff ▪ Is 100% compliant with all LEM and Linkage Grid Requirements and at least 90% of direct reports are compliant ▪ Is anticipatory and proactive in communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inconsistently rounds and does not follow up on information or requests gathered ▪ Inconsistent use of AIDET ▪ Inconsistently uses Supervisory Meeting Model and does not require consistent use by direct reports ▪ Inconsistently rewards, recognizes or provides feedback to staff ▪ Is less than 90% compliant with LEM and Linkage Grid Requirements and/or less than 90% of direct reports are not compliant
<p>Outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overall LEM score is 4.0 or greater ▪ All direct reports on the LEM have LEM score of 3.0 or greater 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overall LEM score is 3.0 or greater ▪ All direct reports on the LEM have LEM score of 2.8 or greater 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overall LEM score is less than 3.0 ▪ More than 10% of direct reports on the LEM have LEM score below 3.0

Resources:

UW Medicine Policy on Professional Conduct: <http://uwmedicine.washington.edu/Global/policies/Pages/Professional-Conduct.aspx>

UW Medicine Service Culture Guidelines: <https://depts.washington.edu/pts1st/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Service-Culture-Guidelines-Word-File092211.pdf>