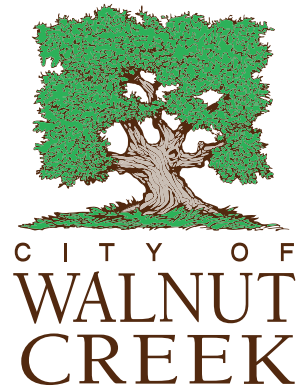




# Coaching Conversations: Solving the Employee Engagement Puzzle



Performance appraisals “...have become the bane of our existence. They are time consuming, often inaccurate, and they really do nothing to improve performance.”

That brutally candid assessment from a manager at the City of Walnut Creek summarizes what executives in the public and private sectors increasingly believe—and what a growing body of research supports. Time-consuming, once-per-year conversations are intended to help boost performance and create a climate of constructive feedback, but the reality is that, most often, neither of these goals is achieved.

*“The results of this program have been amazing.”*

—Fran Robustelli,  
City of Walnut Creek  
Human Resources Director

*“This type of transformational project is the hallmark of MRG.*

*We pride ourselves on innovative, forward-thinking solutions that help our clients achieve their goals.”*

—Mary Egan, CEO, MRG

The annual performance evaluation is ineffective at best, and sometimes does more harm than good. Recent research also shows that replacing the annual appraisal with more frequent, coaching-focused conversations can positively impact employee engagement.

**This coaching approach is something Walnut Creek has been actively supporting since 2015.**

“We knew that getting managers involved in regular coaching conversations would make a positive difference,” says Fran Robustelli, City Human Resources Director.

In 2016, the City partnered with MRG, a world-class consulting firm headquartered in Sacramento, California, that serves over 250 cities, counties, special districts and private sector clients. “We have worked with MRG partners in the past and we knew they could design and deliver a custom training program that would help us meet our objectives,” says Robustelli.

Replacing annual appraisals with quarterly **Coaching Conversations** increased the frequency and quality of feedback and interaction between managers and their direct reports. The results: improved retention, fewer employee relations issues, increased employee understanding of expectations and organizational requirements, and improved job performance.

Claire Laughlin, a workplace communication specialist and MRG’s lead training consultant, developed a customized training program for the City.

“Quarterly Coaching Conversations make sense for any organization that wants to promote better relationships at work and accelerate the process of goal-setting and achievement,” says Laughlin. “What makes this program unique is that we trained both managers *and* their direct reports so that everyone feels a sense of ownership.”

After gathering data across all departments, a curriculum was designed and tested with a pilot group of 24 participants. It focused on processes and skills for workplace coaching, and on how to create conditions for open and honest feedback. The manager’s course also included a segment on understanding

employee motivation. Says one manager, "This course helped me learn ways to go *beyond leading* and become a *truly effective coach*<sup>1</sup>."

The program was rolled out across departments citywide. In all, 219 employees were trained over nine months, representing 29% of managers and supervisors, and 72% of individual contributors. Quarterly coaching conversations are supported by an easy-to-complete online form, which replaces the cumbersome annual performance appraisal form.

Says HR Director Robustelli, "The results have been amazing. It's not just about the performance appraisal or better engagement scores. It's about managers talking regularly with their direct reports and supporting them as they work to achieve their performance goals."

<sup>1</sup>David Tal, "A Culture of Coaching," Entrepreneur, 9/27/17.



*"Coaching conversations are an important means by which experiences are turned into learning....Through coaching, you help people take responsibility for their actions and their development."*

– Center for Creative Leadership

*"The single most important managerial competency that separates highly effective managers from average ones is coaching."*

– Harvard Business Review

If you want to enhance employee engagement in your organization, we encourage a coaching approach!

Schedule a **free intake session** with MRG to discuss your needs.



Providing Innovative and Practical Solutions for more than 250 Cities, Counties, Special Districts & Private Sector Clients

**San Francisco Bay Area** • 675 Hartz Avenue, Suite 300, Danville, California 94526

**Sacramento Area** • P.O. Box 561, Wilton, California 95693

[www.Solutions-MRG.com](http://www.Solutions-MRG.com) • (866) 774-3222