

HR Insights

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Stay Interview Best Practices

Employee turnover can be a significant challenge for employers, as it can lead to increased costs, loss of productivity and a negative impact on company culture. Stay interviews offer a proactive approach to understanding and addressing the needs of employees, ultimately enhancing retention rates. Unlike exit interviews, which are conducted when an employee is leaving, stay interviews are conducted while the employee is still employed at the organization with the goal of identifying factors that contribute to their job satisfaction and commitment.

This article outlines best practices for employers to conduct effective stay interviews.

The Importance of Stay Interviews

Stay interviews are usually once-a-year meetings conducted with each employee and their supervisor or an HR professional. Unlike performance reviews, these meetings focus on an existing employee's attitude toward an organization. Specifically, stay interviews attempt to discover what makes an employee want to work—or stop working—for the organization and any aspects of the company that need to be addressed to make working there more attractive. Not only can stay interviews enlighten employers about issues before they manifest into employee departures, but they also help employees feel heard, showing them that their employer cares enough about retaining them to improve workplace operations.

Especially in a tight labor market, giving employees this level of attention is critical. Even if an employee is resolved to leave, understanding their motivations can help the employer retain other employees who may feel similarly. Stay interviews enable employers to learn this information sooner and address those issues head-on.

Stay Interview Best Practices for Employers

Impactful stay interviews can help maximize employee satisfaction, engagement and retention. Consider the following best practices for stay interviews:

- **Establish clear objectives.** Before conducting stay interviews, employers should establish clear objectives and goals. It's important to determine what information should be gathered from employees and how it will be used to improve engagement and retention strategies. This may include identifying areas of dissatisfaction, uncovering potential issues and recognizing areas of strength within the organization.
- **Integrate stay interviews into onboarding.** Stay interviews aren't just for the company's tenured employees; they can be incorporated into the 30-, 60- and 90-day milestones of employee onboarding. By gauging employee satisfaction early on, employers can proactively address any issues and make necessary adjustments. Early identification of potential problems can prevent them from escalating into larger issues down the line.

- **Create a safe and confidential environment.**

A safe and confidential environment is crucial to encourage open and honest communication during stay interviews. Employees should be assured that their feedback will be kept confidential and that there will be no negative repercussions for sharing their thoughts and concerns. This trust-building exercise can foster genuine dialogue and provide valuable insights.

- **Train interviewers.** Ensure that managers and HR professionals conducting stay interviews are adequately trained in effective communication and active listening skills. Training should emphasize the importance of empathy, respect and nonjudgmental attitudes when engaging with employees. Interviewers should be prepared to ask probing questions to uncover underlying issues and concerns.

- **Ask open-ended questions.** Open-ended questions can prompt employees to freely share their thoughts, feelings and experiences. It's important to avoid leading questions and instead focus on topics such as job satisfaction, career development, leadership and management, work-life balance and organizational culture. Examples of open-ended questions include:

- What motivates you to work here?
- What aspects of your job do you find most fulfilling?
- Are there any challenges or obstacles you're currently facing in your role?
- What do you like least about your job?
- How can we better support your professional growth and development?

- If you could change any aspect of the organization or your job, what would it be?
- What would cause you to consider leaving the organization?

- **Actively listen and validate.** During stay interviews, it's essential for interviewers to actively listen to employees' responses without interrupting or dismissing their concerns. Validating employees' feelings and experiences demonstrates empathy and understanding. Interviewers should paraphrase workers' responses to ensure clarity and show that their feedback is valued. Probing to learn more can also demonstrate authenticity.

- **Identify actionable insights.** After conducting stay interviews, feedback must be analyzed to identify common themes, trends and actionable insights. Employers should look for opportunities to address areas of concern and implement changes that align with employees' needs and preferences. They should also consider involving employees in the decision-making process when looking to make changes to foster a sense of ownership and empowerment.

- **Follow up and track progress.** Following up with employees after stay interviews is crucial to communicate any actions taken based on their feedback and provide progress updates. To evaluate the long-term effectiveness of stay interview initiatives, retention metrics and employee satisfaction levels must be continuously tracked. Strategies should be adjusted as needed to ensure ongoing improvement.

Summary

Employee retention is top of mind for many employers. Keeping talent happy and engaged often starts with understanding what employees want, what they like and what they'd like to change in the workplace.

Stay interviews represent a proactive approach to employee retention, as they allow employers to gain valuable insights into the factors influencing job satisfaction and commitment. By implementing best practices, organizations can strengthen employee engagement, improve retention rates and foster a positive workplace culture. Investing in stay interview initiatives demonstrates a commitment to valuing and supporting employees and their opinions, ultimately contributing to long-term organizational success.

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