

The No. 1 way to retain great employees: Stay interviews

Joel Garfinkle

General Management

By on February 16th, 2015 |



Don't wait until an employee leaves to have an exit interview. Instead, keep your workers with a "stay" interview. This easy, inexpensive interview is a key [employee-retention strategy](#). The "stay" interview will help you reduce employee turnover and keep your top talent satisfied.

Here are the essential elements of a "stay" interview.

- Purpose and benefits
- How does it run?
- Effective questions to ask

Purposes and benefits of a "stay" interview

Your "stay" interview heads off problems before they become frustrations. These interviews help you learn upfront about an employee's issues or challenges so that the desire to exit the job doesn't become reality. Here are five benefits of a "stay" interview.

1. **Shows management concern.** Employees respond favorably when they feel that [management cares about their happiness](#), their frustrations and their career goals. The interview itself can help [increase job satisfaction](#) and retention.
2. **Reviews relationships.** This is a good time to assess how the employee is relating to co-workers, bosses and customers and solve problems while they are little.
3. **Learn what keeps an employee at the company.** Find out what your company is doing right, so you can do more of it.
4. **Discover why they leave.** Learn about personality conflicts, corporate culture, and job dissatisfaction that brings turnover.
5. **Know where to make changes.** Beverly Kaye, co-CEO of Career Systems International, says managers typically find seven to ten things within their control to fix.

How does it run?

Interviewer: Ideally, the manager conducts the "stay" interview because it leads to a better relationship and more understanding. If the manager may be the problem, HR can do the interview.

Interviewed: Interview key employees.

- Who will cost the company the most if they leave?
- Who is at risk of leaving?

- [New hires](#) – especially during their first three to nine months. Interviews address problems and questions and thus reduce anxiety and increase job satisfaction.

When: Typically managers conduct “stay” interviews once a year during a slow time at work. For new hires, it should be twice within the first nine months.

The interviews last under an hour. They can be very informal. Workers may be more forthcoming in an informal setting.

Effective questions to ask

Use natural questions and let one answer guide the next question. Your goal is to learn: Why did you come to work here and why do you stay? What might cause you to leave?

Other questions:

- What do you like about your current job and work situation?
- Do you feel your work makes a difference to the company, the customer, and/or your co-workers?
- Do you feel valued and listened to?
- If you could “manage yourself” what would you do different than your current manager?
- What kind of [quality feedback](#) would you like to be receiving... but are not?
- What parts of your job would you like to do more (or less) of?
- Do you have talents, skills, or interests that we are not making the most of?
- Think back to some time when you felt frustrated. What caused that? What helped to eventually lower the frustration?
- What dissatisfactions made you leave your last jobs? Are any of those elements present in this job?

“Stay” interviews help you [retain employees](#). You learn why they stay with the company. You minimize the frustrations that induce them to leave. You also increase the relationship of trust and build loyalty.

You gain satisfied workers who are more productive. Plus, the company benefits from a reduction of costly and disruptive turnovers.

Joel Garfinkle is the author of [“Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level.”](#) As an [executive coach](#), he recently worked with a mid-level manager who learned to develop her executive presence and gained the respect of her team, enhanced her profile with the company and built the confidence she needed to excel. [Sign up](#) to his [Fulfillment@Work](#) newsletter (10,000+ subscribes) and you’ll receive the free e-book “41 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!”

If you enjoyed this article, join [SmartBrief’s e-mail list](#) for our daily newsletter on being a better, smarter leader.

