

The Power of ‘Stay’ Interviews

Ask employees for insightful feedback before they start looking for greener pastures, and they’ll be more likely to stick around. **BY SARAH LEVITT**

They’re headed out the door. For one reason or another, one of your star employees is moving on to greener pastures (they think), and you’re stuck doing the exit interview.

What if you could rewind the tape and potentially change the outcome? Or, perhaps even better, what if you could glean from all of your exemplary team members what keeps them coming through the door each day, thereby watering and fertilizing your own green pasture?

In other words, what if you had a crystal ball of sorts that allowed you not to just look into the future but, instead, create it?

Welcome to the “stay” interview. Although exit interviews are often the norm, stay interviews have the power to help you crack the code of why your stellar performers stay put, rather than leaving you to be an armchair quarterback trying to figure out what went wrong as they walk out the door.

Below are six reasons to consider incorporating some version of this valuable tool into your leadership repertoire.

1. You can act in the here and now. With real-time information, you can make decisions that impact the concerns that matter most to your team, thereby using two of the most precious resources you have as a leader – time and energy – to the greatest benefit of everyone, including yourself.
2. You’re likely to get more thoughtful answers. Even if an employee wants to share what could have/should have been during an exit interview, there isn’t much incentive to do so. They’ve found a new home, and they are probably no longer invested in the welfare of the organization they’re leaving. Tap their wisdom long before an exit.
3. You’ll create opportunities to grow your employees, thereby growing your organization. Most great employees want more,

not less. More autonomy, responsibility, challenge and input. Asking why they stay will give you insight into how you can help develop them right where they



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are. And, as you grow your employees, you’ll be making your organization more robust as well.

4. You’ll find it easier to receive the feedback and harder to discount it if it’s given in the context of a genuine query. The idea behind doing stay interviews is to make yours an even better company where you want employees to excel. When someone’s on their way out the door, it’s easier to dismiss what they’re saying and never really give it consideration, because, after all, they’ve left.
5. You’ll generate goodwill among your team members. Few actions make more of an impression, that someone matters, than asking for their input. You might not agree with what’s said, or you might decide that you can only implement a portion of what’s being requested. But the mere act of asking builds cohesion and trust, two essential ingredients for generating exceptional team performance

and driving business outcomes.

6. You’ll breathe meaning into the vision of your organization. Mission and vision statements often cite employees as crucial to the organization’s success. But then they hang on a wall, only read by those sitting in the lobby waiting for an appointment. When you ask why someone stays, you’re taking the words off the wall and putting them into practice.

It may seem like stay interviews only have value with team members, but think what they can do with clients. When I was running my greenhouse operation, I did a version of a stay interview with clients. Every year I’d meet with every client, face-to-face, and ask them what we were doing well and where we could improve.

Similar to employee stay interviews, these exchanges generated more than just goodwill. I really listened to what was said, and themes began to emerge. Despite our rock-solid consistency with service, for example, several clients expressed a desire to get their deliveries earlier in the day. It would help them sell more of our product, they said. So I did my best to reconfigure the delivery schedule, which leveraged a request for an improvement into loyalty and longevity.

When you conduct stay interviews, you not only create the possibility for gaining greater insight, you create a more competitive organization in the marketplace. If you think about it, when was the last time an organization or vendor asked you why you stay? And if they did, don’t you think you’d want to stick around?



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