

Stay Interview Toolkit



Contents

Stay Interview Overview	3
How Stay Interviews Help Retain your Best Talent	4
Demonstrate Company Commitment to Employees	4
Prepare for a Stay Interview	5
Setting Expectations for Employees	6
Establishing Trust.....	6
Conducting the interview	7
Let the Stay Interviews Begin!	8
Co-create a Stay Plan with Employee	9
Assess Employee's Engagement	10
Involve Leadership and Human Resources	10
Moving Forward.....	11

Stay Interview Overview

Elevate your talent retention strategy with impactful stay interviews. Stay interviews are dynamic sessions between managers and employees designed to uncover what keeps top performers engaged and dedicated. Unlike traditional recruitment interviews, stay interviews are more casual and they foster open conversations that reveal valuable insights.

According to a recent SHRM's Global Workplace Culture Report, 96% of employees are less likely to dread going to work when they're in a positive culture, and 78% are less likely to look for another job within 6 months. Stay interviews are part of a healthy, transparent and positive work culture.

Implement a stay interview program to gain a strong understanding of your employees' motivations, job satisfaction, and their connection to your company culture. This proactive approach not only identifies reasons for staying, it also provides a comprehensive view of employees' engagement and overall experience.

According to a 2021 [Gallup survey](#), 52% of voluntarily leaving employees believe their manager or company might have taken action to keep them on the job. Stay interviews help a leader get ahead of a possible resignation. The impact a leader has on their employees is significant and concerns employees have about tools, skills and support systems can be identified with effective stay interviews.

Stay interviews are distinguishable from exit interviews and performance reviews. For the differences between a stay interview, exit interview, and performance review, refer to our [Fact Sheet](#).

Differentiate stay interviews from performance reviews, and exit interviews by recognizing that these discussions occur with current employees and are guided by their direct managers. This allows for preemptive action to address concerns and enhance satisfaction before it leads to resignations. Exit interviews, traditionally conducted by Human Resources are reactive and triggered by a resignation. Exit interviews are less likely to be transparent and candid. With a proactive approach, a resignation may be avoided.

Stay interviews can unearth valuable insights, such as the need for improved flexibility for working parents or other issues that a leader can assist with. Addressing these insights doesn't just retain talent but also promotes improved performance. This may also foster a healthy discussion in the event an employee is not a good fit for their current role.

Stay interviews offer surprises and learning opportunities for managers. As a leader, embrace the feedback you receive. Whether the feedback is positive or constructive, use it to refine your support for employees. Even when immediate solutions aren't feasible, the act of seeking employees' perspectives enhances overall employee engagement.

If stay interviews have never been implemented in your company, it is strongly advised to engage in a preliminary discussion with your leader. Harness the support of your Human Resources department in launching this program, ensuring assistance for leaders and

accessibility for all employees. Conversely, if your company already embraces and practices stay interviews, that is commendable.

How Stay Interviews Help Retain your Best Talent

- **Purpose of Stay Interviews:**
 - Gather insights into employee motivations and satisfaction.
 - Tailor retention strategies based on gathered information.
- **Avoid the High Costs of Hiring and Training:**
 - Substantial costs include loss of knowledge, team impacts, project disruption, loss of customers, recruiting, training, and staff time.
 - Concerns during candidate search: declined offers, ghosting, lack of qualified candidates, and prolonged hiring processes.
 - Businesses spend over \$4,000 per new hire and in some cases replacing an employee can cost one half to two times their annual salary (Gallup).
- **Survival in a Competitive Labor Market:**
 - Organizations may struggle to survive the loss of good employees.
- **Proactive Employee Retention:**
 - Addressing concerns and retaining employees saves money.
 - Demonstrates commitment to employee well-being.
- **Communication and Transparency:**
 - Regular communication promotes a healthy work environment.
 - Stay interviews foster open and honest conversations.
- **Knowledge Transfer and Retention:**
 - Stay interviews capture knowledge if an employee is considering leaving.

Demonstrate Company Commitment to Employees

Stay interviews demonstrate a commitment to employee well-being. Conducting stay interviews conveys to employees that the organization is genuinely interested in their well-being and wants to create an environment where employees can thrive while doing their best work. This commitment can contribute to a positive employer brand and provide leaders with valuable insights which helps leaders coach their employees towards a rewarding employee experience.

Studies show that 80% of employees don't feel heard at the workplace. When employees feel that their voices and opinions don't matter, their level of engagement and loyalty decreases. Conducting stay interviews and taking action on these interviews, make employees feel heard and increases their engagement at work.

Prepare for a Stay Interview

Stay interviews are not something where we want to just “wing it”. Conducting a meaningful stay interview requires leaders to put their needs on the back burner with a focus solely on those of their employees.

It is recommended that as a leader, you begin by making a list of all of your employees and then placing 2 columns to the right of their names. The first column should be labeled “Important to Employee” with the second column labeled “What the Leader Thinks”. This will help to anticipate your employees’ top issues. Refer to the [Stay Interview Preparation Template](#).

In the “**Important to Employee**” column, list those items where you have either heard your employee mention the importance of that item or what you may anticipate based on prior conversations. It is important in this same column that you do not list items that are important to you. Just because a leader may think pay is important to an employee, in reality it may not be.

Under the “**What the Leader Thinks**” column, list those areas that you would like to introduce to the employee in the event they do not bring it up on their own. This might include a job skill that you’ve observed that they should expand. It can be leadership opportunities such as mentoring where you have already observed this behavior in that employee. Many times, a leader may see skills in their employees that the employees may not yet see in themselves.

Prepare for Detours

While stay interviews are a positive approach to employee relations, leaders must also prepare mentally for detours that may occur during the stay interview including:

- Your employee may introduce ideas that you never thought of, regardless of how well you think you may know your employee.
 - If this occurs it is important to be flexible in your thinking and ask probing questions to learn more about the topic.
 - The key to remember is while it may not be important to the leader it is important to the employee.
- Make sure the stay interview does not turn into a performance review.
 - Specifically state, before you even start the stay interview, that this is not a performance review.
 - The focus is to keep the discussion on a path that will lead to improved engagement and retention.

Remember you are the facilitator of this meeting and still keep in mind that it is your employees' time to express what is important to them. It will also be helpful when a leader is familiar with a company's employee programs and how they might apply to their employees.

It is especially important to not come across as "defensive" when receiving candid feedback, such as by making counterarguments, or pointing out why the company can't provide a certain benefit. If you do, you risk the employee "shutting down" and no longer providing honest feedback or trusting your efforts. Rather, this is a time to listen. You do not need to have a response or answer for every issue the employee raises.

Setting Expectations for Employees

We recommend that before inviting employees to participate in stay interviews to first introduce the concept in a team meeting. As the leader, let them know that you are looking for ways to make working at the company better for them and their input is critical to this. By letting your team know in advance, they will not worry when you reach out to schedule individual meetings. Be transparent that you will take action on those areas that make sense and that are within your control. Also, if something is not within your control let them know that you will ask about those areas to see if changes can be made in the future.

Let your employees know that you will bring a few questions for them to reflect upon and one of them will be what is most important to them about the company. This will allow employees to give some thought to this particular question.

Schedule each meeting with a 30 minute timeframe. This will convey the importance of staying on track for this important business topic. If there is a need for a second meeting that can always be scheduled to explore a topic in greater detail. An additional benefit is that your employees will be prepared for the first meeting knowing that it is 30 minutes long.

If this is the first time conducting stay interviews or if you are a relatively new leader, start with an employee that you are comfortable with and will be more than likely to present ideas that may have come up before. Then, progress to your most high-performing employees, followed by those who perform well yet, you may be at risk of losing. This order will help you to become more comfortable with additional interviews.

Establishing Trust

Three ways to establish trust with employees is to value your employees, connect with your employees and take care of your employees. Stay interviews demonstrates this to your employees with this conversational format which allows for clarification and follow-up questions

When you have scheduled your initial stay interviews with your employees, choose a location which creates a sense of comfort and is suited to foster a productive discussion. This can be a conference room, a quiet corner in the cafeteria, or a coffee shop. It can even be a walk around your office campus or a bench outside your office.

When a leader's office is the sole available space, it's recommended for the leader to move away from their desk. This signals to employees that the conversation is a collaborative effort, aimed at creatively addressing the employee's needs and fostering a positive work culture for the future.

Conducting the interview

An effective way to initiate your interview is by asking the following five questions:

1. When you come to work each day, what things do you look forward to?

This question grounds the employee in the current environment. As a leader, you have a tremendous influence on your employees' engagement. This question starts the meeting on a positive note and provides awareness about what the employee enjoys about their job.

2. What are you learning here?

Employees want to know they have growth opportunities in their company. As reflected in Gallup's Q 12 survey, question number 11, "This last year I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow." is about their development and growth".¹ This is important to meet the needs of the team and employees. When an employee is able to answer this question in the positive, this provides hope and an understanding for the employee of their path for career success, growth, and development. Some employees may also share their thoughts about future development they desire and tell you what they need from you, their leader.

3. Why do you stay here?

This question can provide valuable knowledge towards understanding their engagement and retention as many employees have never fully considered this question. When they answer this question, you will discover what matters to your employees.

4. When was the last time you thought about leaving our team? What prompted it?

We have all experienced those days that have been more difficult than others and make us question if we want to continue working for a company. As a leader, don't be afraid to ask this question as the answer may provide you with those triggers that can cause an employee to resign and potentially help you to prevent this in the future.

¹ Gallup's Employee Engagement Survey: Ask the Right Questions With the Q¹²® Survey

5. What can I do to make your experience at work better for you?

You may hear comments regarding the need for new equipment, resources, flexibility or even feedback about your own leadership style. You may also hear about things you as a leader are doing that are appreciated and valued by your employee. So of course, you will want to keep doing that in the future.

For additional topics, refer to our [Sample Stay Interview Questions here](#).

Let the Stay Interviews Begin!

Being fully present when conducting a stay interview allows you to focus your entire attention on your employee. The highest form of listening, is more than just using our ears. It is reflected in your body language when you maintain eye contact and acknowledge what your employee is saying with your visual cues, such as a head nod, or a pause to think about what they have shared. Be careful not to interrupt an employee even if you think you know what they are going to say.

At times, an employee may be hesitant or nervous to speak with you. Building trust in these situations involves fostering an approachable demeanor through open body language and active listening. Creating a safe space by assuring confidentiality encourages openness. Be clear about your intentions and how identifying challenges leads to making the workplace even better. As your employees recognize the significance of these conversations, they'll likely feel more at ease and willingly share in future discussions.

Don't hesitate to paraphrase something your employee says to ensure your full understanding of the message. This can be a powerful tool to clarify a message and allow you to further probe into the subject if needed. Secondly, in the event an employee conveys a strong emotion about something, don't hesitate to restate that employee's emotion in a way that demonstrates you understand how they feel. These are skills that a leader can learn and use effectively in their overall communications.

When we listen effectively, we are able to ask great follow up questions that will lead to valuable insights. These types of questions are open-ended and may begin with "Can you expand a bit more..." or "Would you please give me a recent example of that..." for example. Another helpful response includes, "What I'm hearing you say . . . is that correct?" Avoid the temptation to respond with your perspective or in a defensive manner.

As a leader, you will want to capture all key information by taking notes, so that you can refer to them later as you reflect and start to develop your stay plan for that employee. Before ending a meeting restate your own homework to validate to the employee that they were heard and you will follow up on issues that were brought up. This also conveys to your employee that their opinion really matters.

Co-create a Stay Plan with Employee

A detailed and effective stay plan with a timeline works best when it is co-created with your employee. After you have had your initial meeting and have reflected upon your notes, decide on a few action items that can address your employee's needs. Once done, discuss these with your employee as you will want insights to develop the plan. We recommend that a stay plan has no more than three objectives.

A stay plan includes specific activities or actions that you and your employee will commit to. Additionally, you will have dates attached to these activities or actions. This will demonstrate your own willingness to be held accountable and will help to gain an employee's commitment in the beginning. Building stay plans may require a few follow-up meetings especially when you are working with an employee to address their needs and actions will take place.

Tailoring stay plans to individual employees requires an understanding of their unique strengths and preferences. Utilizing tools such as Gallup's [CliftonStrengths assessment](#) provides valuable insights, enabling leaders to optimize work assignments based on their employees' strengths and capabilities. This assessment also sheds light on potential blind spots that an employee may have, that may be providing challenges for them. This creates greater awareness for all parties involved especially if emotions are running high.

It's important to recognize that not every employee may need a stay plan. For those employees who are fully engaged and not seeking additional development, regular check-ins will suffice to address any evolving needs.

A co-created stay plan includes:

1. A clear objective for each item in the plan
2. Actions or activities that both the manager and the employee will take
3. Specific dates by which the above actions and activities will occur
4. A written plan for both the employee and the manager which includes steps 1-3

For example, you may find that an employee shares with you in a stay interview that they need more flexibility in their work schedule. As you delve further into this with the employee you may ask questions such as: What is the perfect schedule for you? Will you be able to complete your required assignments if you worked that schedule? Would working a new schedule impact work and any others on your team? Some possible solutions for that employee would be to consider that new schedule providing, the work standards remain the same or you can consider implementing a peer scheduling method where employees can easily switch to change shifts with each other.

Common subjects that may arise during the stay interview can be communications, conflict with peers, recognition, development, too much work, or a request to work from home. Remember, the first stay interview can provide the leader with insights and areas to consider to maintain a strong level of engagement for that employee. Employees will fully understand if there are some

areas where you may not be able to say yes such as pay or a new role. Yet, just by having this discussion with your employees can make a difference in their overall engagement. Employees understand boundaries when we take the time to explain them. A “no” today does not mean a no forever and provides feedback for you and the company to consider in the future.

Once a stay plan has been created and agreed upon, the importance of a leader fulfilling their part of the stay plan cannot be underestimated. As you recall, stay interviews are a way to build or increase trust and creates loyalty to the company. When we fail a specific employee, this can feel like a betrayal to that employee. Refer to our [Employee Stay Plan – Example](#).

A vital note for leaders: should an employee disclose any issue involving the company's harassment prevention policies, it is required of you as a supervisor to promptly report or investigate the matter. Communicating this information to the employee is crucial, ensuring the well-being of employees and protecting the company's interests. Assure the employee that such information will be shared only on a need-to-know basis.

Assess Employee's Engagement

As you conduct your stay interviews, take a moment after each interview to take the time to answer the question “How long do I believe this employee will stay with our company?” As you review your notes from each employee meeting, there may be some things that they may have said that will alert you of their intentions to stay with your company. It can be something as simple as an employee wanting to go back to college and wondering how that might work with their job. As you review your notes, you may also want to dig a little deeper into certain areas they have mentioned. Based on the information you have gathered from your stay interviews, prepare a forecast regarding your team's retention level.

Involve Leadership and Human Resources

If stay interviews are encouraged in your company be sure to let your leader know that you are conducting stay interviews with your team. If stay interviews are already conducted in your company, consult with your HR team if you are modifying established procedures in place already.

A sample script you can consider to set up a meeting and update your leader is noted below. It is very important that leaders are authentic and honest, so customize the scripts below to your style.

Option 1

“I have begun stay interviews with my team members to increase employee engagement to positively impact retention, and ultimately enhance their performance for the company. In conducting these stay interviews, I hope to better understand what motivates my employees and also what may inhibit their performance at work. I plan to complete a stay plan for those employees as needed to further their goals and to increase their loyalty to our company. Our company has many resources for our employees and I will leverage those along with any new

employee solutions as well. After these interviews I will be assessing how long they may continue to stay with our company. I do plan to continue stay interviews at least once or twice each year with my team based on my findings. I also plan to conduct them even more frequently with my new hires in their first year. Once I have completed the interviews, I would like to share the results of the stay interviews with you at your convenience along with my forecast. I value and appreciate your feedback along the way."

Option 2

"I've initiated stay interviews with my team to boost engagement, retention, and overall performance. Through these interviews, I aim to understand their motivations and any barriers to their work. I'll create stay plans as needed to support their goals and loyalty. Leveraging company resources and new solutions, I'll gauge their potential tenure. I'll conduct stay interviews annually or semi-annually, increasing frequency for new hires. I'll share interview results and forecasts, welcoming your feedback."

As you share your results with your leader and others, they may have some additional suggestions to assist you. Also, your leader will leave the meeting with new information about you and your performance. There is a strong likelihood that they will share your stay interview initiative with other leaders in the organization. You will also be seen as an innovative leader committed to your employees through your stay interview process.

Moving Forward

Stay interviews are crucial to know what employees think about the culture of the company in real time. Unlike an exit interview, you can conduct a stay interview at any time during the employment relationship. Some businesses prefer to carry out stay interviews on an annual basis to understand employees' work-life balance perspective, while other companies conduct them every six months.

You will want to conduct a stay interview at least annually with your team members. As discussed earlier you may have some follow-up meetings as you create and solidify your employees' stay plans. Additionally, with new hires, consider conducting at least two interviews in the first year. For a summary of steps and considerations, refer to our [Stay Interview Checklist](#).

Now you are equipped and ready to move forward with stay interviews. Remember this is not about perfection, it is about progress toward creating the best experience for your employees. You will learn and grow as a leader in this process and show your team how much they are valued and appreciated.