

# How To Use Stay Interviews To Boost Employee Engagement

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A photograph of two people in an office setting, high-fiving. The person on the left is a man with a shaved head, wearing a grey sweater, smiling broadly. The person on the right is a woman with dark hair, wearing a blue and white checkered shirt, also smiling. They are in the middle of a high-five gesture. In the background, there is a whiteboard with the word "mashroom" written on it. The entire image has a light purple overlay.

**What is a Stay Interview?** Think of a stay interview as a research tool. Stay interviews help you identify what's working at your organization and what needs improvement.

# An Overview

A successful stay interview will ask questions about why employees are happy with their job, what's working at the company as well as what's not, and gives employees the opportunity to make suggestions for improvement. Interviews are best done face to face, either virtually or in-person, but can also be sent out in survey form if you want to reach a broader range of employees. You will get better results by speaking to employees, so if you choose to send out a survey, it's really best to include at least a handful of face to face interviews.

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# What are the main benefits of stay interviews?

The results from stay interviews can help you pivot and adjust your business practices to best retain and engage your existing employees. When you know what keeps employees at your company, you can ensure that those practices and policies continue, while making improvements to what isn't working as well.

# It's a great way to strengthen employee-manager relationships.

With workforces dispersed and most people working from behind screens rather than in the same building, maintaining workplace relationships is more important now than ever. It's easy to lose touch with employees when you aren't physically seeing them every day, and in turn, employees can feel that their managers are out of touch.

Conducting stay interviews brings back contact between managers and employees. It shows employees that their managers are listening to their concerns and are hopefully acting on them. It opens up a new line of communication and allows for employees to speak up in an appropriate forum.

# It's a way to connect with new hires and re-engage existing employees.

For new hires, a stay interview shows that you're invested in their development and growth with the company. For existing employees, it does the same but with the added bonus of re-engaging them, especially if check-ins haven't happened frequently in the past. It can show them that you're committed to moving the business forward and providing a top notch employee experience.

# Get the message out first.

You need to inform your employees about how, when, and why you're conducting stay interviews. Without this step, employees could go into the interviews fearful that they're designed to eliminate positions, count towards performance reviews, or otherwise be tied to their individual jobs. Nobody likes to be called to the manager's office without knowing the reason why.

In addition to telling employees why you're conducting the interviews, also give them a broad idea of what you'll be discussing. This gives employees time to think about their answers and allows them to give you deeper insights and more helpful information. It also ensures that they don't go into the interview fearful, worried that their answers will have negative repercussions on their career. The focus needs to be on the collective employee experience not the individual, so don't discuss personal performance in stay interviews.

# Talk to key employees.

You want to make sure you're interviewing a broad range of employees to ensure that you're getting accurate feedback. Interviewing employees across multiple positions as well as choosing employees who are both highly engaged and less so will give you a more accurate representation of what's working and what isn't within your company.

Be sure that you're asking all employees the same questions, as this is the only way you'll get an accurate picture of what's happening within the workplace. You can add one or two questions intended for specific teams such as management to get a better feel for those departments' needs and concerns, as long as they're also answering the base questions.

# It doesn't end with the interviews.

You can't just conduct the interviews and compile the data, you have to act on it. Take what you've learned from your employees and try to implement some of the changes they've suggested. If certain aspects of the workplace really stood out to them, ensure that they continue to be focused on and that new policies and/or procedures don't take away from the things that employees said they like about the workplace.

Choose one or two action items and work on those first, rather than trying to implement multiple changes all at once. Identify which areas were either most criticized by employees or which are most negatively impacting employee experience and focus on those first.

Follow up with employees a couple of months after the first round of interviews. You don't have to hold another formal stay interview, instead the follow up should be a 10-15 minute check in conversation. The goal is to see if employees are reacting positively to the changes, and to listen to why if they say they aren't.

# Stay Interview Questions

## **What do you look forward to each day on your way to work?**

First, we ask a question that brings employees into the here and now, and asks them to focus on their daily duties and challenges rather than expand on broader issues like pay and benefits. Employees stay and engage based on their relationships with supervisors and colleagues and how much they like what they do—and these categories are far more important than pay and benefits.

Effective probes include:

- Give me an example
- Tell me more about...
- Who do you look forward to working with the most?

# Stay Interview Questions

## **What are you learning here, and what do you want to learn?**

Next, we are inviting employees to tell us their desires regarding development and careers. Some are ambitious to advance, some curious to learn more, and others just want to work and go home.

We want to focus these discussions and subsequent stay plans on skills, so probes may include:

- Which other jobs here look attractive to you?
- What skills do you think are required for those jobs?
- What skills would you have to build to attain those jobs or some responsibilities of those jobs?

# Stay Interview Questions

## Why do you stay here?

While appearing simple at first, the question of why employees want to stay at your organization opens major doors for discovery. A good next line is, "Take your time because I really want to know." Employees then must announce to you, and more importantly to themselves, what they value most about their jobs.

Possible probes include:

- Tell me more about why that is so important to you.
- Is that the only reason you stay or are there others?
- If you narrowed your reasons to stay to just one, what would it be?

# Stay Interview Questions

## **When is the last time you thought about leaving us, and what prompted it?**

Everyone thinks about leaving sometimes, so a directly-worded question brings a much-needed conversation into the light. When an employee last thought about leaving tells us the urgency, and what prompted it tells us why.

Possible probes are many. Here are three:

- Tell me more about how that happened. Who said what?
- What's the single best thing I can do to make that better for you?
- How important is that to you now on a 1-10 scale?

# Stay Interview Questions

## **What can I do to make your job better for you?**

While this question sends out a net for all remaining topics, it must ultimately yield answers about the organization's leadership and managers. Remaining neutral is critical, lest word spreads that management cannot take feedback and remaining stay interviews become short and fruitless exercises.

Here are a few probes for consideration:

- Do colleagues, including your manager, tell you when you do something well?
- Does your team say and do things to help you do your job better?
- What are three ways I can support you?

# Other Employee Engagement Assessment Tools

***Exit Interviews:*** By the time you're conducting an exit interview it's too late to implement change – you've already lost the employee. By conducting stay interviews, you can address problems before they become incentives for employees to leave

***Surveys:*** Climate & Culture or Employee Satisfaction surveys are often anonymous which can make identifying issues difficult.

# Contact Me!



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