

# Stay Interviews



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# Keeping your good people before they consider leaving



You may have heard of an 'exit interview' which is conducted when an employee leaves your organisation. However, due to the 'great resignation' and current market trends, it is clear we need to be understanding what can keep our high performing employees around before they choose to leave. This is where stay interviews come into play.

Stay interviews are management led conversations with your current employees. Although they can be casual, they should also be intentional and cover two main topics:

1. What it is specifically that keeps employees happy to stay with your company,
2. And if there is anything which could be improved.

In this article we'll have a look at how to conduct a stay interview and also include some sample questions you could use during these conversations. Lastly, we will look at the benefits of stay interviews and how they could help you keep employee engagement high.

## Setting Up A Stay Interview

The context of a stay interview should be: a 1-on-1 conversation initiated by an individual employee's direct manager.

It's important that it is a manager who conducts this interview as this is the person who has the most potential effect on the daily activities of an employee.

The goal should be: to discover what is working for this employee, and what might need to change to keep this employee engaged and likely to remain with the organisation.

It's important to note, not every employee requires a stay interview, you can work on a selection process if you would prefer a more targeted approach. You could target employees that are usually high performers but seem to be overwhelmed, or you could target employees who are consistently high performing and beneficial to the organisation. You could also have discussions with both.

Setting up a stay interview should be like setting up any other 1-on-1 meeting. You can approach it in a few ways. Here is a simple 3-step process we recommend.

1. Highlight in a team meeting (or prior meeting with your chosen interviewee's) that you will be setting up some conversations to hear from individuals to understand their needs at work and how they are currently feeling in their roles. You can go so far as calling it a 'stay interview' and be open and transparent around why it's important to hear from them. This gives people a heads up to allow them time to think, as well as providing context. It is also a great way to show that you are open to feedback and that you care enough to hear from your employees.
2. When sending the meeting invite, include some points of conversation or an agenda in the description so that employees can come prepared with their thoughts. We recommend setting aside an hour per stay interview.
3. Show up on time with an open mind and your best listening skills.

Most high performing employees are aware of what's happening in the job market and how businesses are required to focus on employee engagement and satisfaction. This kind of interview shouldn't come as a surprise and will likely be happily received.



# What to Include In Your Stay Interview



Start with the right mindset! Stay interviews shouldn't be intimidating or nerve racking. The whole point is to understand an employee's point of view – even if there are points discussed that you don't agree with or that you feel as if you can't change. Take note anyway and realise if there is a pattern of the same feedback being brought to you.

We highly recommend starting with a casual chat, a simple 'how are you going?' and 'what's new in your life?' discussion can help make people feel at ease and set up a relaxed environment.

Then you can get into the questions. Here is what we recommend being included in your stay interview.

## Start with the positives

- What do you enjoy most about working here?
- What is it that keeps you happy to work here?

These may receive the same or similar answers, however, asking both can be beneficial in encouraging elaboration.

## Then, learn more

- If you could change something about your job, what would that be?
- Do you feel valued at work? (Why or why not?)
- Optional addition to previous question: What would help make you feel recognition at work?
- Do you feel like you can grow professionally here? (Why or why not?)
- What is a motivator for you? (Alternatively, what demotivates you?)
- How do you feel about your current work-life balance?
- Be open to hearing some feedback.

## Be open to hearing feedback

- What is something that could drive you to leave?
- What do you like least about working here?
- If you could change anything about the team, what would it be?

## Listen to how you can help

- If you could change anything about the company, what would it be?
- What can I do to best support you?
- What can I do more of or less of as your manager?
- Is there something you would prefer, or like to do that you currently don't in your role? (If so, what would that be?)

## Finish with some intentions

- What are the most important goals you would like to accomplish in the near future?
- What do you need that's preventing you from reaching those goals?
- How can we best support you to achieve those goals?

This may feel like a lot of questions, and it may not feel right to include them all. You may think 'yes! I need to ask that!' but other questions may not feel as relevant for the employee you've chosen to interview. This is a general guide and includes any and all things that could be asked in a stay interview to gain deep insight and understanding about the high performing employees in your workplace. However, it is great to begin with the positives and follow through with this flow of learning, feedback, support, and goal setting.

# After Your Stay Interviews



## Write down the data!

There are products which will send out surveys to your employees to get similar answers and collate the data for you, however, stay interviews are more personal and often receive more detailed and honest answers that can provide a clearer strategy for change.

Most obviously, collate all feedback and especially repeated feedback. Think about if there is a cultural or management shift that needs to be had or are the issues individually based? Make a list of changes that the company can work on to help with repeated issues as well as individual issues that need to be addressed. It can be helpful to colour code this list from highest priority to lowest priority.

It is also important to collect all feedback and realise which employees are likely to stay, who are neither engaged or disengaged, and who is likely to leave. (Again, feel free to colour code!). This can help you prepare your plan of action, and it can also be a good guide to see how you are tracking once the company has implemented changes based on feedback. A second stay interview can be conducted in the same way as a progress check in to see if they feel more supported and/or still happy or not happy.

# Benefits of a Stay Interview



## Retaining top talent

Stay interviews were designed and born from improving employee retention. It is an obvious benefit that stay interviews are increasingly helpful in retaining top talent. Keeping your key employees engaged and satisfied within their roles is so important, in fact, often salary increases come second when measured against items such as feeling valued, work-life balance, and good company culture. All things where changes can be made without costing organisations too much. Stay interviews indicate genuine care for employees and will always encourage employees (even those who are unhappy) to re-think what they want out of their workplace and what is worth leaving for, or not. Especially when feedback is taken on board and implemented.

## Improve your business by feedback

When conducting stay interviews you have an amazing opportunity to identify issues and create solutions. Overall, by improving issues based on employee feedback, not only are you able to retain top talent, but you are also able to create a more engaged workforce with an enhanced employee experience. You give yourself the opportunity to weed out concerns that have been causing employee dissatisfaction, high turnover, staffing issues and/or inefficient processes or management.

What seems like a decent amount of effort and work up front to organise, will ultimately benefit your business in the long run for the better.

## Establish strong trust and loyalty

Through creating a culture of feedback, equal understanding, and process improvement businesses can simultaneously build a culture rich with employee trust and loyalty. When we 'do what we say we'll do' and create a culture of 'actions speak louder than words', businesses create a space that employees are proud to be part of. Once feeling and seeing their feedback being taken seriously, employees are likely to develop trust in the leadership of a business that will in turn lead to the above two benefits including staying with the company and progressing their career, as well as contributing to a positive work culture that has a flow on effect from colleague to colleague.