

Stay Interviews are Important and Here is Why

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Introduction

Have you ever asked yourself whether or not an exit interview is conducted a bit too late? Many people know about exit interviews but not many know what stay interviews are. Conerly (2018) believes that it may be too late a stage when conducting exit interviews because it is like “talking to cows about why they left the barn”. It is always great to know why employees continue to work for an organisation and what the employer can do to improve the experience of their human capital and how to retain their best employees. This article, we will talk all about stay interviews. Whether or not you are an employee or employer, the information will be helpful I further understanding what stay interviews are and why they are important.

What are stay interviews?

A stay interview is an interview conducted by a manager and their subordinate while the employee is still working in the organisation (Heathfield, 2020). During this process, the manager gathers information from the employee about why they continue to work for the organisation. By doing this, the employer gains a better understanding of what their employees love most about the organisation. At the same time, some areas of improvement can be identified and improved on to retain their best human capital.

At surface level, stay interviews may seem like “the other side” of an exit interview where the goal is to identify what employees love about their job, rather than why they are leaving (Conerly, 2018). Although this is a great way to know what is pushing employees away, it is also important to know why they are still there and what could make them stay. Why wait until someone is leaving to understand what drove them away from you? Conducting stay interviews provides an opportunity for employers to retain their key staff by providing a work environment that fosters healthy work habits.

Statistics around stay interviews

Research has been conducted by (Conerly and Finnegan, 2018) to understand why employees are leaving organisations now more than ever. The two concluded on a few reasons as to why this is happening, based on data collected from their research. “Hard data proves the top reason why employees quit is they don’t trust their managers

Why should you conduct a stay interview?

Heathfield (2020) provides a few reasons why stay interviews are important to conduct while employees

are there.

- **Building trust** - A stay interview is an opportunity for employers to build trust with employees and to assess the degree of [employee satisfaction](#) and [engagement](#) that exists in the organisation. Where there is trust, anything is possible. Employees give off their best to an organisation that genuinely cares about their wellbeing and experiences. To solidify this trust, the employer needs to ensure that proper action is taken for what the data collected in the interview to be realised.
- **Two – way conversation** - Stay interviews are preferable to employee satisfaction surveys because they provide a two-way conversation and a chance to ask questions and follow up on ideas. Conversations are a great way to hear what both sides (employers and employees) think about each other and the current position that they are in. when instructions are constantly one-way, employees may begin to feel devalued by the people they are working for.
- **Current** - They also deal with current employee happiness or concerns, not with how they felt last month or over the past quarter or year. Unlike conducting an exit interview, stay interviews focus on the “now” and why employees are in the organisation then. This prevents waiting until it is too late to understand what employees did not like for the organisation.

[When should you hold a stay interview?](#)

There are certain indicators that prompt employers to holding stay interviews with their employees. Just like how exit interviews are prompted by an employee leaving, stay interviews usually take place when an indicator shows a sign that something may be going on.

- Staff turnover
- Attendance
- Total sales
- Profitability

When any of these performance indicators show otherwise about the organisation’s performance, management is usually pushed to hold stay interviews. This is to try and capture what experiences the employees are going through. Perhaps the work environment is not catering for a certain group of people which could be affecting their performance.

Although it is good to hold these interviews when there is a negative indicator in the organisation’s performance, it is also a good idea to hold them when things are going well. This reinforces the trust to be built between the employer and employee or to reinforce it if it was there. “If your organization’s climate lacks trust, you’ll need to rebuild that trust before you can conduct meaningful stay interviews” (Heathfield, 2020).

[What questions should be asked in a stay interview?](#)

Just like any other interview, there needs to be a framework on the sort of questions to be asked during the interview. Remember, these interviews are trying to establish why employees are currently with the organisation and to try and do everything they can to keep them satisfied by working in the organisation

in the future. These are the sort of questions to base the interview around (Finnegan, 2010).

- When you travel to work each day, what things do you look forward to? Get to know what motivates the employees to come into work each day. By knowing this, it can help the employer to improve on this and to provide more reasons for them to come.
- What parts of your job are the most enjoyable...or even the most fun? A job should not only entail the duties and responsibilities that the employees need to do as a part of their job. An employer should help to create an environment that allows for the job to be more enjoyable.
- What parts are the most challenging? It is no doubt that a job has some challenges when it comes to executing it. It may come as a surprise to the employer that what the employees find challenging in their jobs may actually be a technical issue that can be fixed.
- What are you learning here? What do you want to learn? Learning and development is an important aspect of working in an organisation. Employees may be overwhelmed because of the work structure in the organisation. Overworking may take away a lot of time from employees learning new things and upgrading their skills. Taking interest in what employees may want to learn can benefit the organisation in the future. When someone suggests an area that they would want to improve in, that initial drive can push them to do and be better.
- How do you like working with other members of our team? The working environment is an important aspect of the organisation. Without these stay interviews, an employer may not find out some important information about the relationships that are in the organisation. A working relationship is crucial for performance in the organisation. A sour relationship can negatively impact how individuals (or groups) perform at work. This can be a source of motivation or demotivation.
- What about me? What can I do to help you stay longer? Besides being at work to work, managers and supervisors need to remember that a personal approach to their subordinates can be motivating. Asking how they are and who they are, may prompt managers to manage employees better. This avoids a one size fits all approach in managing employees.
- Are there specific reasons you can think of that could cause you to leave us? Although employees may not be as open about this question, knowing some reasons why someone may leave may be very beneficial. By knowing if there is something that can push away employees, employers can take it upon themselves to improve on this aspect and prevent this from happening.

What to do in a stay interview?

Stay interviews are not only about the employer and what they need to do. As an employee, it is important to know what to expect in a stay interview. It is most likely that you will be alerted in advance that there will be a stay interview held by your direct management team. Even though this is not an interview to get the job, knowing what it entails is equally important.

- State what you would want or need as an employee of that organisation. Finnegan (2010) outlines that it is important to be in an environment that caters for you. Since stay interviews do not always happen, this is an opportunity to state (respectfully and practically) what you would need as an individual to thrive in that environment.

- State your boundaries. Boundaries are not always physical at work. Some may be psychological, emotional amongst others. Know who you are and what you can and cannot tolerate in the workplace. By setting your boundaries, working becomes a bit better.
- Consider what your work environment provides and lacks. Take time to think about your surroundings in the workplace. Is the organisation supportive? Do you have a proper chair that does not hurt your back when you sit for long hours? How easy is it to get to work from your home?
- Understand whether or not your job is fulfilling and why. Being a part of an organisation should not solely be about the salary you receive at the end of the month. Look for more meaningful things that your job offers. This is something that you wake up and do daily. Since you spend most of your time

Example of a stay interview question and answer

Indeed (2020) provides guidelines on how to answer questions in a stay interview according to the questions asked. Although it is not the best idea to enter with a rehearsed answer to a question, it is good to have an idea of how to stand up for yourself in a respectable manner.

After all, an employer expects performance from you and you expect something in return.

In a stay interview, Employers ask this question to get the most direct feedback. You may want to change a range of things, from the way something is handled to the actual content of a project itself. The key to answering this question well is to think about how it could be better. If you can give a detailed answer that shows how to improve, you are more likely to see that change. Below are a couple of questions provided by Indeed (2020).

- **Q: What part or aspect of your job would you change if given the opportunity?**
- A: “I would change the way we deliver finished projects to clients. When projects are completed, we just hand the deliverables over to the client. While this works some of the time, we often have problems down the road that need to be addressed and take up a lot of time. I would change it so we had a meeting with clients to explain the deliverables as we hand them over. That way, they can ask any questions, and we can clarify how to help clients implement the new deliverables without problems.”
- **Q: “Has anything happened during your time here that made you think about finding another job?”**
- Example: “I thought about quitting when we hired a new project leader. I had applied for the position and thought I was qualified and had the right experience for it. When Roger was hired, I was flustered because I know the supervisor received my application, but I __was never asked to interview for it formally. It felt like I was being passed over and not taken seriously. Plus, Roger put several of our projects in disarray, and the team was blamed for it. I worked with Roger to fix the problems in the projects, and I talked with the supervisor again about not being interviewed. We were able to come to an understanding of the whole situation, and things have been a bit better since then.”

The above question may make you uncomfortable at first but it is one of the most useful questions the interviewer or employer could ever ask. You can use this opportunity to show the employer [what your values are](#) and what has kept you from leaving. Focus on the resolution to the problem so your interviewer will have a better understanding of how to address similar issues in the future. Layout an answer that gives context to the situation, even if the interviewer should already be familiar with it. You need to explain your point of view when answering the question so your answer is taken in the right context.

What should the employer do after the stay interview?

It is not enough for employers to conduct stay interviews to know why employees stay or leave then not do anything about it afterwards. Heathfield (2020) urges employers to do two major things post-interview.

- **Commit to Positive Changes** - If an organisation decides to conduct stay interviews, they must commit to making positive changes. Otherwise, it's an exercise in frustration for the employees. When changes are made, it is crucial to inform employees these resulted from their suggestions and responses in stay interviews. In most cases, the employee's direct manager should conduct stay interviews to develop open communication. The manager is the person who can most readily make an impact on the employee's daily working conditions. If stay interviews are conducted but no real change is brought about, the trust that could have been may be lost in the future.
- After a stay interview, managers need to debrief on the data that they collected during the interview. Debriefing allows the organisation to determine what needs to happen in individual departments and what's better addressed on a company-wide basis.

Canerly (2018), warns employers not to become prejudiced against employees who express their views on the organisation and they may possibly leave. “Be careful not to trivialise how employees perceive a department or organisation. You may disagree with the views expressed, but they are real to the employees participating in the stay interviews” (Canerly, 2018).

It is also warned that by explaining away the responses, making excuses, or becoming defensive will derail an employer's quest to understand employee satisfaction. After all, the goal is to create an organisation that retains its best employees. As employees see their organisation respond to their concerns and needs, the stay interview process will positively impact [employee morale](#).

Conclusion

Stay interviews are extremely important when wanting to retain employees in the organisation. Solely relying on exit interviews to understand what drives away employees and keeps them. As Conerly (2018) outlined, “talking to cows about why they left the barn”. Do not wait until it is too late to understand what is keeping employees.

When conducting these interviews, be sure that real change is ready to be implemented. By allowing employees to open up about sensitive issues may leave employees more vulnerable and sceptic about the

organisation's intentions. Trust is the biggest reason that can keep or push away employees in the organisation.

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