

Exit Interviews

When an employee leaves, an exit interview can provide a great learning opportunity - the chance to better understand how effectively your organization is recruiting and retaining employees, what the workplace culture is really like, and can even provide an opportunity to “make peace” with a disgruntled employee who might decide to talk with you, instead of a lawyer. Sometimes an exit interview can even allow you to hold on to a valuable employee, who might change his/her mind about leaving, given the time to think things over and the chance to discuss it more thoroughly.

Here are some things to keep in mind during an exit interview:

- Make sure the employee understands that the participation in the exit interview is purely voluntary. If someone does not want to participate in a face-to-face exit interview, offer a voluntary questionnaire. But if the employee simply does not want to participate, let it go.
- When possible, have a second person there. If the conversation goes well, it can make it more congenial and spread the learning across the organization. If the conversation goes poorly, having a second set of eyes and ears can be helpful.
- Whenever possible, conduct the exit interview face to face. Body language and facial expression can add a great deal to better understanding the comments.
- Listen more than you talk. Prepare a list of questions but give the employee lots of space to answer to answer the questions completely. Probe into comments that are not clear by asking “why”?
- Have a prepared list of standard questions, so that everyone has the opportunity to respond to the same topics. Take notes on a standard form, which can go into the personnel file, and allow you to identify possible themes about why people are leaving.
- Finish the exit interview with an open-ended question, such as “is there anything else you’d like to add that I haven’t asked about?”
- Thank the employee and do your best to end on a positive note. Promptly follow-up on any promised tasks and wish the employee success in his/her new endeavor.

Sample exit interview questions

- Tell us about your decision to leave, and the key factors in your decision.
- What could have been done early on to prevent the situation developing/provide a basis for you to stay with us? Could the issue have been avoided? If so, how?
- How do you feel about the organization? How would you describe the culture here?
- What has been enjoyable and satisfying for you in your time with us?
- What has been frustrating or difficult in your time with us?
- What could you have done better had we given you the opportunity?
- What can you say about communications within the organization/your department? How could this be improved?
- What can you say about the way your performance was measured, and the feedback to you of your performance results?
- Did you have clear goals and know what was expected of you in your job?
- Did you receive adequate feedback about your performance day-to-day and in the performance development planning process?
- What would you say about how you were motivated, and how that could have been improved?
- How could the organization reduce stress levels among employees where stress is an issue?
- What can the organization do to retain its best people (and not lose any more like you)?
- What advice would you give to someone just starting work here?
- What are the key qualities and skills we should seek in your replacement?
- Would you consider working again for us if the situation were right?
- What can we do to enable you to pass on as much of your knowledge and experience as possible to your replacement/successor prior to your departure?