STAY INTERVIEWS: A TOOL FOR ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION

A “stay interview” is a structured conversation that a leader (anyone who manages someone) conducts with an individual employee to learn specific actions that can be taken to strengthen the employee’s engagement and retention with the organization. At its core, the stay interview is a personalized tool that leaders use to get to know their employees professionally and to keep talent within the organization.

Core Features of Stay Interviews

- In Person: Ideally, stay interviews should be conducted in person, even if a meeting must be scheduled weeks in advance due to travel, etc.
- Manage expectations: Leaders should tell their teams that a stay interview will be scheduled with each individual so that they can hear what keeps employees fully engaged and remaining at the organization.
- Allow Enough Time: Stay interviews should take 20 minutes or less, but to ensure the conversation is not rushed, leaders are encouraged to tell employees that 30 minutes will be scheduled on their calendars. (Leaders may choose to start with interviews they feel will be easier in order to build their skills and confidence.)
- Detach from Performance: Stay interviews focus on what leaders can do for their employees, and not on how employees can do their jobs better. Stay interviews should be separate from performance evaluation meetings.
- Organic: Do not send questions to employees in advance. Conversations should not be scripted (but questions can be for consistency). Take time to listen, jot down notes, and then ask discerning questions that can lead to deeper responses and potential solutions.
- Prepare Opening: Leaders should begin the stay interview with a consistent approach that points the employee in the right direction but does not make any promises or imply a contract. Example: I’d like to have an informal talk with you about the reasons you stay here at Colby and how we might be able to make this a great place to work for you.
- Closing: Summarize conversation—key points discussed and potential solutions. End on a positive note and be appreciative. Example: Let me summarize our conversation; here are the reasons you stay, why you might leave, and how we can help make this a better place to work for you. Thank you for your time and sharing your thoughts with me.

Key Advantages of Stay Interviews

- Build better connections with your employees—they hear that they’re important to the College’s success and you want them to stay.
- You drive your employees’ and department’s success.
- Employees are more likely to proactively reach out to you with a concern instead of immediately looking for another job; they accept responsibility for staying because they feel empowered.
- Open and honest communication with your direct reports—building trust and strengthening relationships.
- Replacing employees, especially key players, can be time-consuming and costly. Stay interviews are a meaningful strategy to help you retain top performers.

Drafting Stay Interview Questions

The right stay interview questions help your employees understand:

- You appreciate them and recognize their service.
- You care about them as people, beyond their performance.
- You’re open to taking action in order to make their jobs more satisfying.

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Drafting Stay Interview Questions (continued)
They help you uncover:

- Pitfalls and obstacles to employee success.
- Ways to retain employees in which you’ve made a significant investment.
- Often simple, cost-effective changes that reinforce your employees’ commitment.

The key to an effective stay interview is to be concise and not ask too many questions. Open ended questions are best in order to encourage thoughtful responses. This approach should be successful as long as you practice active listening, ask follow up questions as needed (shows you care and are listening), and take notes (captures key points and important quotes, and helps develop solutions).

Example Questions

- What excites you about coming to work each day?
- How does your work challenge you and help you grow, and are there new things you would like to learn?
- What keeps you working here?
- Have you ever thought about leaving us? When was the last time, and why?
- Is there anything I can do to make your job better?
- If you could change one thing about your job, team, or the College, what would it be?

Be Prepared
Anticipate employee questions and keep in mind that employees will have different perspectives based on their length of service. Be prepared to follow up on employee requests.

Employee issues and concerns often center around: resources (pay and staffing—work/life balance), scheduling (flexibility in work hours/location), and career growth. For example, employee feedback could include:

- I perform better than others or have been here longer, but others make more money than me.
- The workload is unreasonable; we need more people to get all this work done.
- I don’t see myself as being able to have a career here.
- Can I work different hours to avoid traffic or to better meet personal responsibilities?
- I am getting bored with my work; what can I do to grow?

Stay interviews can help you spend your time, energy, and resources in the most productive way, as long as you remember solutions have to focus on functions and/or projects within your sphere of influence and on the business purpose of the job. Questions about salary or other College policies should be discussed with HR prior to making any commitments. Reach out to your HR Business Partner with questions.

For More Information