

Introduction

As managers and leaders our success is a direct reflection of the success of our people. We are responsible to hire, coach and performance manage people who will succeed in their roles; who will grow with the company as they develop their career, and who ultimately will progress beyond us in a succession plan. At the end of the day, our success is their success.

Therefore there is nothing more challenging or upsetting than having one of your team members resign. It is particularly tough if you don't see it coming and you don't have a grasp on why they are leaving. Exit interviews are critical to any organization as they offer opportunity for the employee to discuss their reasons for leaving and enable the organization to review and improve staff retention policies

What are exit interviews?

An 'exit interview' is a structured process where the departing employee can openly discuss their reasons for leaving their job. They can review their employment history with the organization and smoothly and professionally work through transition details. Employees that leave each have grounds for making their career choices. Exit Interviews are designed to help management determine the actual reason behind a person's detachment from the company. The aim is to provide people a comfortable environment where they can provide frank and honest answers on topics regarding the department, team, manager and company.

Why exit interviews?

Exit Interviews are designed to help management determine the actual reason behind a person's detachment from the company. The exit interview can provide positive reinforcement of the company's desire to remain in contact and to develop the relationship further regardless of their employment status.

The purpose of exit interviews includes:

- Uncovering possible organizational issues
- Managing transition
- Managing knowledge
- Managing relationships professionally
- Providing feedback and suggestions on how to improve

Who should conduct exit interviews?

Exit interviews are normally conducted by the HR team. However to ensure neutrality and confidentiality, the organization can choose to use a computerized survey or outsource the process to a professional agency. The former option has its inherent limitations and is unable to capture softer issues & nuances critical to the process. More and more HR Managers are today opting to outsource the Exit Interview process to professional companies who have the skills and trained personal, and bandwidth to conduct exit interviews and deliver qualitative and timely inputs.

Structuring the exit interview

Don't treat an exit interview in a casual manner or as a formality. Ensure that it has a structure and purpose to it. Remember that the more you can find out about why an employee is leaving the more opportunity this gives you to make improvements to the organization to prevent further resignations. Ensure that appropriate staff conducts the interview and that you guarantee confidentiality. Arrange Exit Interviews in the final week of employment and keep a written record of the feedback. Some tips and checklist:

Determine the most effective design of the Exit Interview which covers your bases on all sides of the issue. Begin your Exit Interview with the most obvious question first: ask them why they are leaving? Realize that Exit Interviews should be conducted calmly, encouraging meaningful answers. Do not act shocked or become defensive when they tell you something you do not want to hear. What they are telling you is probably vital. Find out what would have made them stay – if anything.

Following is a sample of the kind of questions you may choose to ask in your exit interview:

- Why did you initially join this organization?
- What would you change about your job?
- What was the most satisfying aspect of your job?
- What was the least satisfying aspect of your job?
- Did anything trigger your decision to leave?
- Did your job responsibilities turn out to be as you expected? What would you improve to make our workplace better?
- Were you happy with your pay, benefits and other incentives?
- What was the quality of the supervision you received?
- What could your immediate supervisor do to improve his or her management style?
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- What could your immediate supervisor do to improve his or her management style?
- Would you consider working again for this company in the future?
- Ask a "fantasy" question: If the CEO left and you took his/her place, what would you do?
- Can this company do anything to encourage you to stay
- Any other comments?

Ranking and Rating Statements

With ranking statements you could create a list of statements and then ask the individual to rank order them from most important to least important based on their opinion. For example, ask them to rank the following 6 statements in order of most true to least true. I decided to leave the organization because of:

- Compensation and Benefits
- Management
- Future Career Development and Opportunities
- Company Culture
- Job Skills

Importance of Exit Interviews

They provide an opportunity to 'make peace' with disgruntled employees, who might otherwise leave with vengeful intentions. Exit interviews are seen by existing employees as a sign of positive culture. They are regarded as caring and compassionate - a sign that the organisation is big enough to expose itself to criticism. Exit interviews accelerate participating managers' understanding and experience of managing people and organizations. Hearing and handling feedback is a powerful development process.

Every organization has at any point in time several good people on the verge of leaving because they are not given the opportunity to grow and develop, at the same time, ironically, that most of the management and executives are overworked and stretched, some to the point of leaving too. Doesn't it therefore make good sense to raise the importance of marrying these two situations to provide advantage both ways – i.e.: facilitate greater delegation of responsibility to those who want it? Exit interviews are an excellent catalyst for identifying specific mistakes and improvement opportunities in this vital area of management development and succession.

Conclusion:

Employee exit interviews can change the climate of the organization by changing management style, making changes that reflect employee opinions, and creating value recognition programs where needed. In a broader perspective, exit interviews provide information about overall management style of the company. An employee who is discharged may not be happy about it, and his or her comments will have a negative slant. But there's usually plenty of truth to be learned as well. Taking a more positive view of the exit—this is also the time when many employees are willing to point at deficiencies in the company, comments such as, "poor management or supervision", "complete lack of supervision and support", "poor communications", etc.. Exit is just as important as the procedures one uses while hiring. Handled in a professional way, exit practices can be constructive, useful and improve your work environment and above all improve your retention.

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