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How Stay Interviews Can Help Retain Diverse Talent



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Leadership

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It's no secret that 21st-century business requires a diverse workforce. Speaking purely from a pragmatic standpoint, companies need employees who can visualize problems from any number of different possible angles and perspectives — and be able to solve those problems.

If a company lacks a diversity of minds and perspectives, it lacks the ability to find new solutions and stays mired in the same-old problems it's always faced. The time-honored perspective of a chosen handful of white males, most of them hailing from a small economic subset, **can no longer meet modern consumer demands**.

For the sake of consumer and company alike, the time for diversity in the workplace can no longer be delayed or denied. In order to remain afloat, nimble and relevant in today's world, companies need to find room in their ranks for people of color, women, LGBTQ+, neurodivergents and multigenerational employees. There simply isn't any wiggle room or workaround for doing otherwise.

Many businesses nowadays find themselves struggling when it comes to learning how to retain a diversity of top talent. It isn't enough anymore for companies to *have* a diverse or inclusive workforce. They also need to *understand* this workforce — and what factors can keep it loyal and productive. And that's where the importance of things like stay interviews comes into play.

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What Is A Stay Interview?

Stay interviews are programs designed to gauge employees' deep-set attitudes toward their jobs and their responsibilities at work — and determine whether they feel satisfied in performing those roles. By having honest, frank, heartfelt and safe discussions about the nature of their work, managers can learn whether the people who work directly under them feel

as if their voices are heard, or whether they see themselves having a long-term future at the company.

By finding out what makes their employees "tick" as individuals, managers can learn how to keep their employees motivated — and *excited*, even — when handling day-to-day work tasks.

Furthermore, one can loosely divide stay interviews into two main categories: preventive stay interviews and reengagement stay interviews. Managers conduct preventive stay interviews to ensure team members who are already content with their jobs remain so. The best medicine, as they always say, is preventive. Meanwhile, reengagement stay interviews can be used for employees who *already* feel adrift, unheard or ignored by their peers and managers.

On The Need To Be Aware Of Differences

Even if a manager feels like they've done everything in their power to make a particular employee feel empowered to do their work, there's often much that remains unseen and unaddressed. Any good manager can sense almost immediately when an employee's work output isn't up to par — but a great manager should always want to understand *why*.

By bridging that inevitable, yawning interpersonal communication gap, by understanding the precise reasons *why* an employee feels a given way or behaves in a certain fashion when it comes to their work, stay interviews helps a manager understand how to best help their employee achieve their goals at work. Not only that, it lets the employee know they are *valued*, that they are more than just a living, breathing KPI or a means to a business end — that in fact, the employee is a full-blooded human with their own unique (and equally valid) manner of perceiving the world.

Despite their best efforts, a manager might not be able to grasp their employee's racial, gender, sexual, cultural, religious or ethnic background —

and the lifetime of experiences and perspectives that go hand-in-hand with that background. It's a fact of life that men don't always understand women — and vice-versa. It's also a fact of life that cisgender white people don't always understand the experience of people of color — or people who identify as LGBTQ+.

What It Takes To Have A Great Stay Interview

As a general rule, a manager should conduct a stay interview within three months of an employee's onboarding. They should follow up at *minimum* with additional, annual stay interviews — or as many interviews as they feel are needed.

Before conducting the actual stay interview, the manager should make it clear to the employee that the stay interview is meant to be an honest conversation between human peers and equals. It's about understanding where the employee is coming from in terms of their background or in terms of what they're going through currently. In other words, a manager must emphasize the stay interview *isn't* about an employee's job performance. Doing so negates the whole purpose of the exercise and puts the employee on their guard in what should be a forthright discussion.

A good stay interview shouldn't contain any surprises. The manager should prepare a list of five or six general questions they want to ask their employee and send that list to the employee beforehand. The questions should be general enough that conversation can unfold naturally between manager and employee (no "yes-no" questions), but they should be specific enough that the employee understands the questions are relevant to their particular perspective, background or personal situation.

As a further show of good faith, a stay interview should always be hosted in private. If this is going to be a serious discussion and reveal serious, personal details about an employee, it's on the manager to make sure it stays

that way. To put it briefly, one shouldn't conduct a stay interview in a crowded cafeteria jostling with other people — and within their earshot.

In Summary

If conducted well, regularly and thoroughly, stay interviews can set the table for an honest, one-on-one discussion between people who don't otherwise feel they share a lot in common — at least not on the shiny, corporate surface of things. They can provide an environment that establishes trust, empathy and appreciation between people who might not be able to have it otherwise.

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