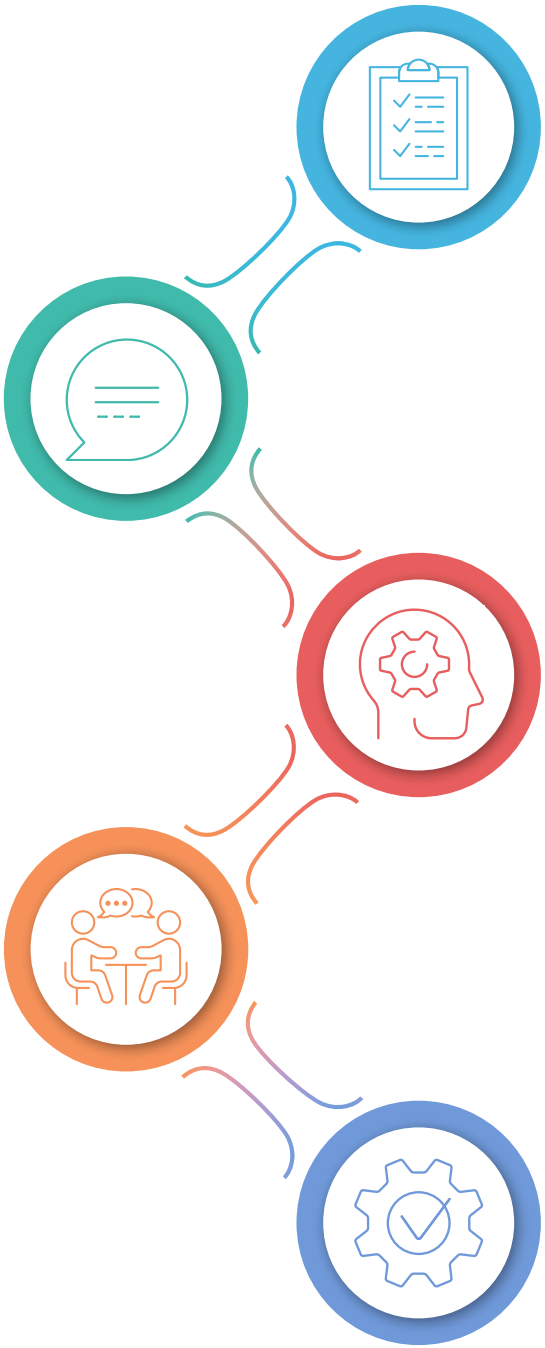


THE CENTER FOR LEADERSHIP STUDIES
THE GLOBAL HOME OF SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP®

THE HANDBOOK FOR EFFECTIVE

STAY INTERVIEWS



Introduction

Retention is a top concern for most organizations as they struggle to keep their best talent.

As we all look for ways to get ahead of attrition and retain high performers amid the current upheaval, “stay interviews” have emerged as a valuable strategy. Rather than waiting until the exit interview to understand what a valuable colleague was struggling with, stay interviews empower managers to build trust and get ahead of disengagement by understanding the person’s strongest felt need.

When it comes to motivation, it is critical to understand and address someone’s key motivators to enable their best performance. Stay interviews provide opportunities to share these without judgment, then build responsibilities around them. They serve as a powerful way to retain valuable employees and equip them to thrive in your organization.

This handbook is designed to help you implement game-changing stay interviews to retain high performers in your organization.

Copyright © 2023 Leadership Studies, Inc. All rights reserved.

What is a Stay Interview?

A stay interview is a transparent conversation that focuses on employee motivation to facilitate positive improvement and change.

The purpose of a stay interview is to understand what is working well for the employee and what can be improved to increase their success and engagement.

Organizations use stay interviews to identify problems and solutions, support succession planning and assess the health of company culture. When done effectively, stay interviews can build trust and loyalty and help retain top talent. They also provide valuable insight into an employee's well-being.



A Stay Interview is Not...

- a performance conversation
- a regular 1:1 meeting
- an HR meeting
- an exit interview
- an intervention
- an interrogation

Copyright © 2023 Leadership Studies, Inc. All rights reserved.

Stay Interviews vs. Exit Interviews

Stay interviews and exit interviews are both methods used by organizations to gain insight into their employees' perspectives and experiences, but they serve different purposes and are conducted at different times.

STAY INTERVIEWS

- Take place while the employee is still with the company
- Conducted by the employee's manager or their manager's supervisor or superior
- Focused on current employee experiences and future goals
- Designed to address potential issues before they lead to turnover
- Used to retain employees and reduce attrition

EXIT INTERVIEWS

- Take place when the employee is leaving the company
- Conducted by the employee's manager or a Human Resources representative
- Focused on past experiences and reasons for leaving
- Designed to gather feedback and insights to improve the organization
- Used to identify areas of improvement and reduce future turnover

Copyright © 2023 Leadership Studies, Inc. All rights reserved.



Plan

The first step to effective stay interviews is proper planning.

Determine the order of your stay interviews and consider how you will prioritize members of your team. It might be best to start with a highly engaged team member who will provide you with a pulse check of the work environment and positively influence the others in the wake of their stay interview.

Remember that a stay interview is not just another annual review. It is prompted by a leader and guided by their questions, but fully led by the employee. Stay interviews can happen once or twice a year. We recommen that one be with the employee's direct manager and the other be with their manager's supervisor, a Human Resources representative or another leader who influences their situation now or in the future.

Remember that a stay interview is not just another annual review.

Copyright © 2023 Leadership Studies, Inc. All rights reserved.

Plan

Be sure to plan for the location and time of day for the interviews.

The length of a stay interview can vary, but we recommend one hour. Consider if it needs to be virtual due to distance, or if an in-person conversation would best be held in an office, common area or restaurant.

It is also important to plan your opening and tone for the interviews days before the conversation. Do not underestimate the power of deliberately preparing the environment you wish to create, including your body language and facial expressions.



Copyright © 2023 Leadership Studies, Inc. All rights reserved.

Communicate

Once you have prioritized your list of stay interviews, the next step is to communicate about them with your employees.

We encourage you to use email, team meetings and 1:1s to explain the purpose of these interviews and what you hope each team member will personally receive from the conversation. To foster trust, you should also be clear about what you hope to accomplish with the conversation.

Create calendar events with reminders so they do not sneak up on you. Be sure to block the 15 minutes before and after each stay interview, as well as your own preparation time in the days prior.

To foster trust, be clear about what you hope to accomplish with the conversation.



Copyright © 2023 Leadership Studies, Inc. All rights reserved.

Communicate



Here is a communication template to get you started.

Hi everyone,

As you know, retaining our best talent is a top priority for our organization and we want to do everything we can to understand your needs and support your growth and development. That is why I/we will be conducting stay interviews with each of you over the next several weeks.

These stay interviews will focus on your experience here and provide you the opportunity to share your thoughts and feelings about (insert your list… your job, current joys as well as challenges, strengths, suggestions, what you need…) to be most successful.

The goal is to identify issues, concerns, suggestions and dreams you may have, then find and plan solutions together.

I want to assure you that these stay interviews are completely confidential. Your responses will not be shared with anyone else without your permission. My/Our goal is to create a safe space for you to share your thoughts and ideas, without fear of any negative consequences.

I will reach out to each of you soon to begin scheduling these interviews. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or concerns.

Thanks,

(Your Name)

Copyright © 2023 Leadership Studies, Inc. All rights reserved.



Prepare

After you have scheduled the interviews and communicated expectations, set aside time to thoughtfully prepare for each session in advance.

Prior to each interview, reflect on the employee's strengths, level of engagement and aspirations and determine your main questions for them. Share those questions with the employee in written form 24-48 hours before the session so they may also prepare. However, make sure the meeting doesn't turn into the employee reading off a script of prepared responses; it should be a conversation with dialogue and follow-up questions.

Select from the list of questions provided in this handbook and add your own. Have a mindset of curiosity, setting aside your preconceptions and assumptions to be genuinely interested in what you may have missed or never had the opportunity to allow them to reveal about work from their perspective. Plan for 1-2 follow-up questions for each main question, allowing the employee to reveal more information and deeper context.

Have a mindset of curiosity, setting aside your preconceptions and assumptions.

Copyright © 2023 Leadership Studies, Inc. All rights reserved.

Interview

It is important to create a safe environment when opening the stay interview.

You can achieve this by expressing your appreciation for the employee, reiterating that the purpose of the interview is to understand their experiences and needs and reassuring them that their honest feedback will be valued and used constructively to improve their work experience.

As you close the interview, be sure to reserve the final 5-10 minutes to identify action items and desired outcomes you both would like to see. Be clear about which actions you will take and how you will provide updates, as well as which ones the employee will take and how they will share progress or further support needed.

Let your final words be positive and express appreciation for the employee and their openness with you.

Identify action items and desired outcomes you would both like to see.



Copyright © 2023 Leadership Studies, Inc. All rights reserved.



Interview

Here are a few tips and best practices for conducting effective stay interviews that build trust, enhance performance and increase retention.

1. Take notes throughout the interview to capture key points but maintain consistent eye contact to show that you are fully present and engaged.
2. Eliminate distractions and interruptions by closing your door, setting a 'do not disturb' message and silencing all notifications.
3. Allow for silence by letting the employee take a moment to consider and think through their responses to follow-up questions. Let them know you also might take a moment to process something they shared or make a note of new information.
4. Keep the conversation focused on the employee's experience. Avoid detours that don't relate directly to the stay questions.
5. Avoid discussing specific people or engaging in complaining or gossip that can detract from the interview's purpose.
6. Pay attention to the employee's and your nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions and body language, to gain insight into how each of you is feeling and responding during the interview.
7. Use the interview as an opportunity to cultivate trust by being yourself, showing genuine interest in the employee's thoughts and feelings and expressing sincere appreciation for their willingness to share their thoughts and spend time with you.

Copyright © 2023 Leadership Studies, Inc. All rights reserved.



Interview

Here are a few sample questions to help you get started.

It's important to remember that these are just examples, and the questions should be tailored to the specific employee and their role within the organization. Additionally, the questions should be open-ended and encourage the employee to share their thoughts and feelings, rather than "yes or no" responses.

1. What is your favorite part of your job/role here? Which tasks and responsibilities do you feel allow your strengths to shine?
2. What has been the most challenging aspect of your role over the past 12 months? What one thing are you most proud of doing, creating or being, that has helped you come this far?
3. What continues to be a daily challenge or concern for you? If you could begin to solve it right now, what would you do or ask?
4. What larger issue concerns you? What is a possible solution or even first step you would recommend to senior leaders?
5. What are you most optimistic about in the next six months?
6. What knowledge, experience and skills would you enjoy the opportunity to share with colleagues? Are there industry-wide conferences, training/certifications, publications or presentation opportunities you would like to explore in the next 12 months?
7. Is there anything you would like to take off your plate? Who could we prepare to give it to, or how could it be replaced or eliminated with better strategies and solutions?
8. What is your biggest frustration? What are you currently doing to constructively handle this and channel energy into positive solutions? If you're not winning this battle, how can I help?
9. Have you ever had a coach or mentor? Is this an opportunity you would like to explore? What would you hope to learn and develop through such an experience? Do you have a certain person in mind?
10. Whom have you coached or mentored in some way in our organization in the past year? What are you most proud of helping them to accomplish through that relationship?
11. What word (or movie line or song title) would you use to describe our culture here? Tell me more about why you chose that word/phrase. What word (line, title) describes a better or stronger place for our organization? What is one step toward that ideal that you would be willing to take?
12. In my role, what is one thing you believe would enable me to be more effective and empowering of people? What is something you think I do well that I could lean into even more?
13. If there was one thing you could share with our CEO (SVP, Dept. Head, etc.), what would it be? Why did you select that? What would you hope could change if they heard what you want to say?

Copyright © 2023 Leadership Studies, Inc. All rights reserved.

Follow-Through



When the stay interview is over, the next step is to follow through on the information that was shared and the action items that were identified.

Updates on progress can be shared in regularly-scheduled meetings (1:1s, annual reviews, quarterly touchpoints, etc.), but short and specific emails, or quick and deliberate in-person communication continues the personalized and appreciative approach that was carefully created from the start.

Taking specific actions based on the information provided by the employee to address their concerns, needs and suggestions for improvement demonstrates your commitment to creating a positive work environment. This is critical to improving their work experience, increasing their success and engagement and retaining valuable people. This ultimately benefits the entire organization.

Increasing success and engagement retains valuable people.

Copyright © 2023 Leadership Studies, Inc. All rights reserved.

Conclusion

Many organizations are concerned about retaining their top talent, especially during times of upheaval.

Stay interviews are a valuable strategy for building trust and creating a safe place for employees to share their perspectives and needs. These interviews enable you to replace judgment with understanding and create actionable strategies that will help retain your workforce.

Stay interviews empower managers to identify and address key motivators that can turn disengagement around and equip employees to perform at their best.

We trust that this handbook will powerfully support your strategy to increase success and engagement and improve retention, so that employees thrive throughout your organization.



Copyright © 2023 Leadership Studies, Inc. All rights reserved.



Interested in learning more? info@situational.com | 919.335.8763 | situational.com