

How to conduct an effective exit interview

Meet Sophia. She's an A+ player who can juggle more projects than Kim Kardashian posts Instagram selfies.

Problem?

Sophia decided to throw in the towel and look for greener pastures. That means you'll have to start the [costly recruitment, hiring, and onboarding dance](#) all over again.

Argh.

Don't stress.

You might not be able to keep Sophia on board but—you can prevent others from jumping ship if you run a stellar exit interview with Sophia.

Why have an exit interview

Here's the thing: most HR pros are wired to attract talent rather than excavate insights from people who want to call it quits.

Why bother with someone who chose to check out, right?

Wrong.

That's because employers are faced with a whopping [\\$8.5 trillion shortage of great talent](#). It means it's easier to run into a jeweled squid than a robust new hire.

There's more: replacing a departing employee [costs between 20-21%](#) of their salary.

So—

Instead of chasing new talent, it's best to analyze recurring issues and figure out why people opted to quit. AKA run a strong exit interview.

Explain the “why”

Remember Sophia?

She doesn't want to have an exit 1:1. Sophia thinks the interviewee will either play blame games or beg her to stay.

Good news? You can flip things around.

Explain to Sophia that you just want to (1) understand why she chose to move on and (2) if she can offer suggestions for improvement on a company- or team-wide scale.

Once she knows the reasons for an interview, she'll be more willing to come forward.

Pro tip: Consider telling the departing employee that no matter what they say in the exit interview, it won't affect their reference letter. This should help them open up and talk about sticky issues.

Use timing to your advantage

Most companies run exit interviews on the last week of a staffer's stay.

Problem? The person—Sophia—has mentally checked out and is long disengaged.

Solution? There are two:

1. Run an interview halfway between when Sophia told you she wants to quit and her actual leaving.

Sophia's initial rush of emotions will run dry by then, and she'll be engaged enough to share feedback.

1. Set up an interview one month after Sophia left the company.

Sophia will unplug by then and get a better perspective on the situation. In the end, you'll have a more honest discussion.

Get the right person to run the interview

Like most employees, Sophia didn't quit the job. She quit her manager.

So—if Sophia's direct manager runs the interview, it'll have the same impact as a fly on a windshield.

Solution?

Put an HR rep or a second-line manager in the driver's seat. These folks are in the buffer zone. It'll allow them to elicit the most honest feedback. Also, they'll have the power to intro changes based on Sophia's suggestions.

Ask the right questions for maximum impact

You've made it to the juicy part.

Now—most exit interviews are emotional roller coasters for both HR pros and departing employees.

Your task? Keep the emotions in check and become the swiss-army knife of data extraction.

Below is a list of 13 exit interview questions that'll help you elicit the most honest responses.

Reasons for leaving the company

1. What prompted you to look for another job?
2. What makes your new position more attractive than the present job?
3. Can you name the biggest factor that drove you away?
4. Would you recommend this workplace to your friends?
5. Could we have done anything to prevent you from leaving the company?

Role-specific questions

1. Did you receive workplace training or mentorship opportunities? How effective were they on a scale of one

to 10?

2. Can you say that the role met your expectations?
3. Did you receive recognition for your successes from your manager and coworkers on a regular basis?
4. Were the expectations toward you clear? In other words, did you have clear goals in your role?

Suggested changes

1. Is there anything you'd improve or change in the company as a whole or within your department? Can you name one-two things?
2. What's your least favorite thing about the work environment?
3. What do you think about our company culture and our values? Do we stand by them?
4. Is there anything you'd like to share that we didn't talk about