

A comprehensive guide to exit interview questions

When an employee announces their decision to leave your company, you want to use their departure as a learning opportunity. Having an exit interview is a strategic way to gather crucial information. That information can be used to improve employee engagement and retention for current and future employees. However, you must ask the employee leaving the organization the *right questions*.

Approach exit interviews with a strategic mindset and you'll learn how the company can improve. This might include process improvement opportunities, common HR issues, and problems with individual managers. You can also learn how you stand up against the salary, benefits, programs, and perks of competitors in the industry.

If you structure your exit interviews right, you can uncover the following 3 crucial things.

- Problems in the organization.
- Insight into the exiting employee's feelings about the company.
- An understanding of the competition amongst other companies.

Exit Interview Questions

Here are 12 of the best exit interview questions to ask when you conduct exit interviews. Be sure to approach each question with an open mind. When employees feel comfortable speaking openly during their exit interview they'll provide honest feedback and you'll get the most value from the experience.

Why did you begin looking for another job?

This is a great open-ended question that can reveal invaluable information. Based on their response, you might find that they sought something different from their career (i.e., a promotion, increased pay) or lifestyle goals (i.e., working from home, working part-time). Alternatively, they might reveal their issues with the company, such as lack of support, poor management, or a toxic work environment.

Pay close attention to the answers you receive to this question.

Did your manager provide you with what you needed to succeed?

A significant component of the exit interview is understanding the support provided to employees by those in leadership. If the management team didn't provide the tools, development opportunities, constructive feedback, and support needed for an employee to succeed, that's information you need to have.

Based on this employee feedback, you can further investigate your current leadership environment. It's likely others feel the same, and making these adjustments can help decrease employee turnover.

What did you like most and least about the job?

Having this information will help you to make informed decisions for both current and future company employees. For current employees, highlight and emphasize the most favorable things about the company. Then, make changes to the parts of the job that are least desirable.

Also, having this information on hand can help you better manage expectations in your job description for new hires. It's important to paint a realistic picture of a specific position and working with the company in general.

Were your achievements recognized and appreciated within the company?

Employees must believe their contributions are recognized and appreciated to feel valued in the company.

The answer you receive will let you know whether this is an area that needs to be improved. When employees feel valued, they're more likely to remain with the company, be more productive, and feel more motivated.

When employees don't feel valued, they're more likely to seek employment elsewhere.

What suggestions do you have for improvement?

There's no doubt employees have suggestions for improvement related to their role, policies, processes, and the company as a whole. That's why receiving this insight directly from them is invaluable.

Based on this feedback, you might identify ways to improve the company that you haven't yet considered. You also may be able to implement improvements that could dissuade other employees from leaving.

Is there anything we could have done to change your mind about leaving?

This is another way to get to the bottom of why the departing employee is leaving.

For example, they may mention an increase in pay or full-time remote work opportunities. If these options are plausible, consider whether incorporating these suggestions would increase employee satisfaction. You can also implement these things for new employees, giving them a better start with the company.

Would you recommend this company to a friend? Why or why not?

From this question, you might learn that an employee had a positive view of the company, but it wasn't a good fit. Alternatively, you might discover their employee experience was so negative they wouldn't recommend someone else.

If they wouldn't recommend the company to a friend at all, it could mean there are deeper issues. When employees give this response, try to understand why they wouldn't recommend the company and make putting necessary changes in place a priority.

If they would recommend the company, that's good, because it means their overall view of the company wasn't negative. These employees can serve as an excellent referral opportunity.

Did you share your concerns with the company before leaving?

You want to cultivate a company culture where employees feel comfortable expressing their management concerns. Having open communication can help increase job satisfaction and reduce turnover rates overall.

If the employee says no, it shows that there might be an overall lack of communication within the company. Or, it's possible management didn't make employees of certain demographics or with certain personalities feel

comfortable speaking up. You want to address these potential issues as well.

If the employee says yes, perhaps management didn't take the concerns seriously, or a communication breakdown occurred somewhere along the way.

Either way, it's important to get to the bottom of the issue.

Has your role changed since we hired you?

Sometimes an employee's role changes due to a promotion, restructuring within the organization, or simply adjusting who's responsible for specific tasks.

If changes are made that lead to the position being less appealing, it can cause employees to part ways. You want this information to better manage changing roles in the future. You may need to provide more in-depth training, or improve transitions between departments so there's a better overall experience for employees.

Were your work goals and responsibilities clear?

Employees often excel with clarity. If there's a lack of clarity around their goals and responsibilities within the company, they likely won't feel comfortable in their position. That feeling of being unsettled can lead to unhappiness within their role and the decision to leave the company altogether.

If there's a lack of clarity around goals and responsibilities, that's a red flag to make changes to related systems.

What skills and qualifications do you think we need to look for in your replacement?

While management and human resources staff might be clear on what they think is needed in an employee to be successful, it's helpful to hear it from someone who was in the role.

Employees might have a different perspective that can change who you're seeking when hiring for this role based on their experience.

What benefits or programs do you feel we're missing from the organization?

Finally, this is an overall helpful question that can help you identify additional areas to build upon within the company.

Maybe a flexible work schedule, gym membership discounts, or better health care options might draw in better talent and give your current employees more of an incentive to stay.

These are often small changes that can make a significant difference.

Final Exit Interview Strategies

As you complete your employee exit interviews, keep in mind these additional strategies so you can get the most out of this process.

Be respectful

Always treat employees with respect and gratitude throughout the exit interview process no matter their reason for leaving the company. While they may be choosing to leave now, it doesn't mean they can't refer good talent or recommend the company's products or services to others. Your goal is to end the conversation with a positive final impression and gather the information you need to make necessary changes within the company.

Seek valuable information

Ask the employee for ideas if you think they'll provide valuable information. Remember, your exit interview is a time to gather valuable data you can use to make improvements. Don't shy away from the tough exit interview questions that feel uncomfortable.

Gain a broad understanding

Ensure your exit interview is broad. Your primary goal shouldn't be to learn about how much money the employee will be making at their new job or a general idea of why they're leaving. You want to ask several questions to get a broad understanding of their experience with the company, the new company they'll be working for, and the improvements they recommend.

Get specific

Ask for specific examples. Getting specific examples allows you to identify instances — good or bad — to highlight or improve.

Make use of what you learn

Use the information to inform your retention strategy. Retaining quality employees is essential, so after your exit interview, be sure to follow up and use the information. Don't just leave it in a document on your computer or in a notebook. You want to take action on details shared and analyze trends over time to discover commonalities amongst employees who leave the company.