

**STAY**

**GUIDE**

# Interview

An Employee  
Retention  
Strategy for  
Supervisors



**D | H | R**

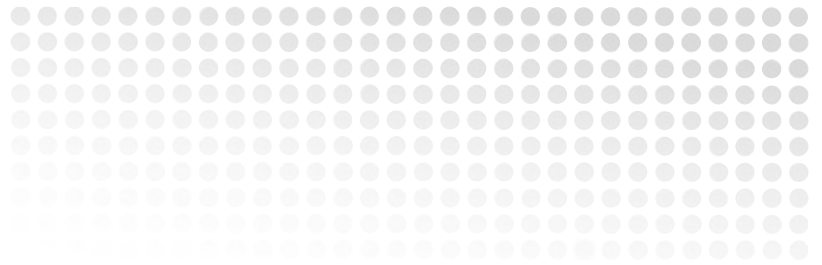
Department of Human Resources  
County of Los Angeles



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>4</b>	<b>PREFACE</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION TO THIS GUIDE</b> Background • Purpose • Who Should Use This Guide?
<b>5</b>	<b>THE SUPERVISOR ROLE IN TURNOVER AND RETENTION</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>OVERVIEW OF STAY INTERVIEWS</b> Definition • Benefits • Exit Interview Comparison • Stay Interview Success Stories
<b>10</b>	<b>FRAMEWORK FOR CONDUCTING STAY INTERVIEWS</b> Sample Questions • Guidelines on Timing • Participants • Time Commitment • Process
<b>16</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b> Overcoming Challenges • Effective Supervisory Skills and Practices • Final Thoughts
<b>18</b>	<b>APPENDIX</b> A. Stay Interview Fact Sheet for Employees B. Stay Interview Sample Phraseology C. Potential Solutions to Common Concerns D. Sample Stay Plan E. About the Authors F. Sources



Imagine the scene. A highly productive worker stops by your office and asks to have a word with you. His demeanor is uncharacteristically sheepish, tentative. When he closes the door behind him, you know instantly what is coming. A valued employee is about to resign.

Dismayed, you ask him why. Was it some recent management decision? A problem with a coworker? Money? The employee diplomatically replies that the new job is an opportunity he could not turn down, but reveals little about his true motives. You can hardly blame him. He is leaving the company and has nothing to gain by telling you the truth.

Dismay turns to disbelief. Not only was the individual a high performer, his gregarious personality energized his teammates. His departure will affect their performance and hurt morale. What's more, it reflects poorly on you. How could this have happened? There were no signs he was preparing to leave.

Or were there?

- *The Retention Dilemma*  
Hay Group

## PREFACE

County executives are the leaders in implementing change management efforts by shaping culture through demonstrating and reinforcing what is valued. The information presented in this *Guide* can assist County executives in making employee retention and engagement a departmental priority.

## INTRODUCTION TO THIS GUIDE

### Background

The Department of Human Resources' Strategic Workforce Planning Program provides resources to help departments achieve the County's Strategic Plan Goal of Operational Effectiveness. As part of this effort, this *Stay Interview Guide: An Employee Retention Strategy for Supervisors* introduces Stay Interviews as powerful tools for supervisors to use to better understand their employees and improve employee retention.

### Purpose

This *Guide* presents information that can serve as a useful foundation for implementing Stay Interviews. Specifically, it has been developed to

- summarize the turnover process and the supervisor role in employee satisfaction, engagement, and commitment.
- present an overview and structured framework for conducting Stay Interviews.
- provide resources to help make the Stay Interview process meaningful and productive.

### Who Should Use This Guide?

This *Guide* was written primarily for first-line supervisors. However, it can provide useful information for all levels of supervisors.

# THE SUPERVISOR ROLE IN TURNOVER AND RETENTION

Voluntary turnover at the County of Los Angeles is historically low, leading some to perceive retention as not warranting much concern or action.<sup>1</sup> However, a “hidden” form of voluntary turnover is prevalent in our organization which may alter this perception.

Consider that in the most recent analysis of turnover, only 1,271 employees chose to leave County service over a 12-month period compared to over 5,000 who moved between units within a department or from one department to another department.<sup>2</sup>

From this additional perspective, voluntary turnover becomes particularly impactful for the individual supervisors left with teams to lead and vacancies to fill in the aftermath of these voluntary separations. These vacancies represent the employees in whom supervisors had invested time and effort through onboarding, day-to-day development, and mentoring.<sup>3</sup>

Determining what actions, if any, could have prevented this turnover requires an understanding of the *specific* reasons that influence employees’ decisions to stay or leave. Numerous studies point to the relationship with the supervisor as a key driver of employee turnover. For example, the Saratoga Institute authorized a study of data it collected on nearly 20,000 employees who resigned from their various employers. The study found that 75% of these employees left for a reason over which their supervisors had influence. Each reason is listed below with the percentage of employees citing it as their reason for leaving:

- Limited career/promotion opportunities (16%)
- Lack of respect and support from supervisor (13%)
- Lack of challenging/interesting job duties (11%)
- Supervisor lacked leadership skills (9%)
- Supervisor’s poor employee relations (4%)
- Favoritism displayed by supervisor (4%)
- Lack of recognition for contributions (4%)
- Training (3%)
- Poor Working Conditions (3%)
- Poor Senior Leadership (2%)
- Harassment/Discrimination (2%)
- Supervisor was incompetent (2%)
- Supervisor lacked technical skills (1%)
- Co-worker's attitudes (1%)

## County **Turnover** Facts<sup>2</sup>

- Exiting employees cited “Personal Reasons” (42%), “Non-County Employment” (19%), and “Other” (13%) as their top three reasons for deciding to leave County service.
- Nearly 61% of the employees who decided to leave County service did so during their **first five years** of employment.

## Dismaying Disconnect

While 89% of managers think employees leave because of pay, 88% of employees leave because of reasons **other than pay**.

- Study of Saratoga Institute data

<sup>1</sup> “Turnover” in this *Guide* refers to non-retirement voluntary turnover.

<sup>2</sup> eHR Advantage data. Rounding occurred.

<sup>3</sup> Although *some* turnover can be healthy, this *Guide* presents it as a generally undesirable event (i.e., the loss of **employees you want to keep**). Even when the job market encourages employees to stay, supervisors are still at risk of losing their best performers with in-demand skills to other supervisors internal and external to the County.

This research finding is good news because it means that **YOU** have the power to do something to minimize turnover among your team.

To take action, it is important to understand that turnover is not an event; it is a process. It can take an employee weeks, months, or even years to reach the actual decision to leave.

As shown below, the unfolding nature of the turnover process allows for many points along the decision path where you can intervene to encourage key talent to stay.

Engagement is the extent an employee is satisfied with, motivated by, and effective in his/her job. The **seeds of disengagement** grow throughout the turnover process and negatively impact your team long before an actual separation occurs.

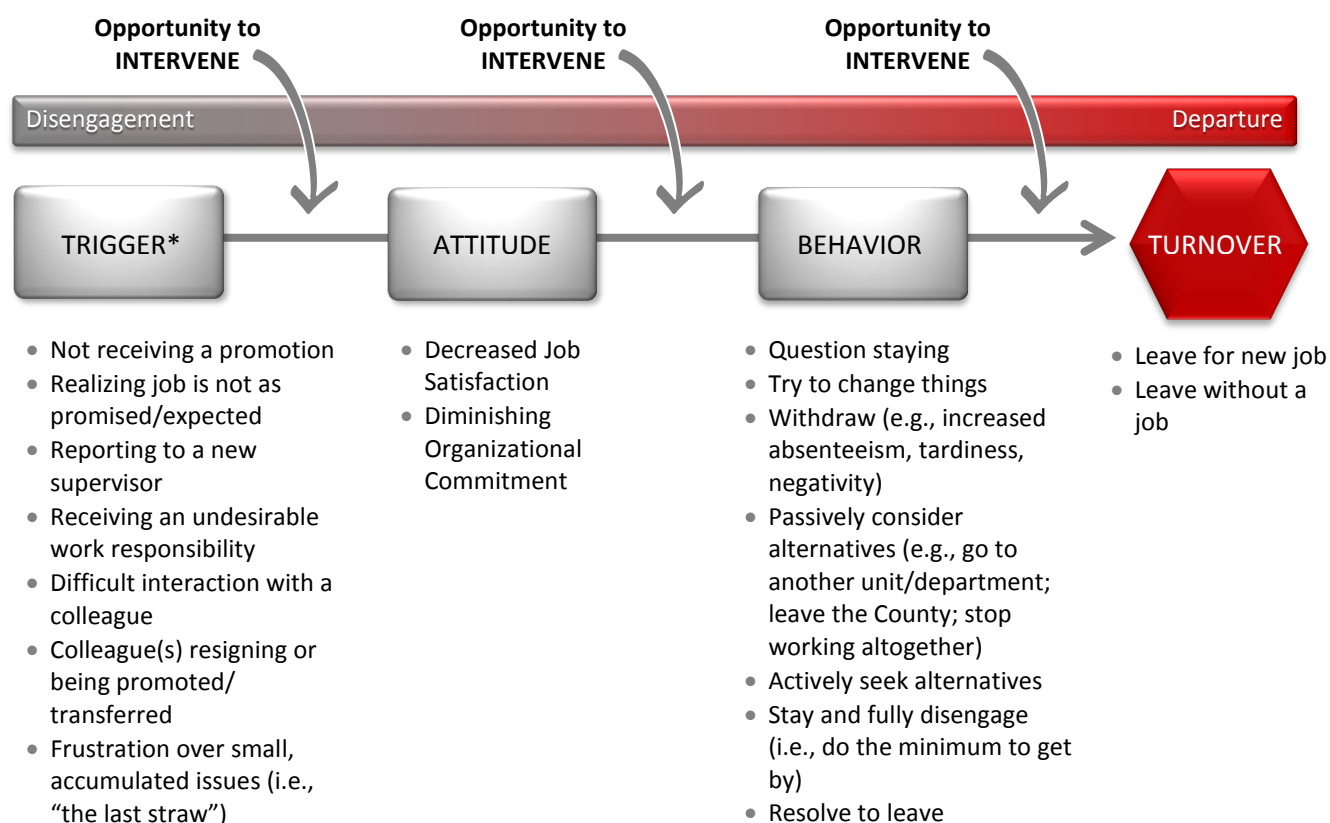
- A disengaged employee loses an average of 14.1 days per year to lost productivity.

(Towers Watson)

- Disengaged employees are 5 times more likely to leave than engaged employees.

(Corporate Leadership Council)

## THE **TURNOVER** PROCESS: A Journey from Disengagement to Departure



\* Only professional triggers are shown. Personal triggers can also initiate this process.

Because your greatest opportunity to successfully intervene occurs early in the turnover process, it is critical for you to know your employees and what contributes to their specific decisions to stay or leave. Conducting regular Stay Interviews is one way to obtain this awareness and open up discussions to reverse or, better yet, preempt the turnover process altogether.<sup>4</sup>

All employees have a need for professional growth. When they feel they are not moving forward in ways that are important to them, they will begin to seek out contexts and activities that will facilitate the professional growth they need. This can result in some employees choosing to leave their positions. However, professional growth is an *interpretive* accomplishment; it is not achieved in the same way for all employees. Professional growth can be marked by any of the following:

- gaining desired knowledge and skills
- acquiring expert status in a particular field or with a specific function or process
- obtaining a variety of experience across different fields or functions
- achieving a certain level within the organizational hierarchy

The ways your employees define professional growth – and how this growth is nurtured – strongly influences decisions to stay or leave. Conducting Stay Interviews provides you the opportunity to assess how your employees define professional growth, which can reveal possibilities for satisfying their professional growth needs in a way that retains the employees on your team (e.g., diversifying or expanding their duties, keeping work within the scope of the classification specification; providing cross-training; encouraging them to compete for vacancies on your team, if applicable).

It's not always about growth through promotions. There are simply **not enough boxes on the organizational chart to promote all the promotable people.** Fortunately, there may be other ways to create opportunities for employees to grow in their current positions. Moving up the organization chart and away from your team does not have to be the first or only answer for your talented and ambitious employees.

We acknowledge that some turnover on your team is unavoidable based on the career growth some employees seek. These employees will choose to leave your team even if there are no perceived issues or concerns that a Stay Interview and follow-up actions could address. As a supervisor, you must recognize and support your employees' professional growth, in all the ways that are meaningful and important to them.

The next sections of this *Guide* will present an overview and structured framework for conducting Stay Interviews.

---

<sup>4</sup> For supervisors who currently utilize techniques promoted by the Stay Interview process, the Stay Interview can still be a beneficial approach to further enhance the good working relationships you have built with your employees.

# OVERVIEW OF STAY INTERVIEWS

## Definition

As a supervisor, are you concerned that your employees might leave your work unit? Do you know what *specific* factors influence your employees to stay or leave? Are you aware of the truly impactful actions you could take to help retain your staff? The most direct way to find answers to these questions is to talk with each of your employees.

A **Stay Interview** is a periodic, informal discussion between a supervisor and employee about the employee's level of job satisfaction and specific ways the supervisor can help to maintain or enhance it. During Stay Interviews, employees share information about one or more of the following:

- Stay Factors:** positive work characteristics that impact their job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment
- Concerns:** problematic work issues that impact their job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment
- Requests:** specific actions they seek from the supervisor to resolve their concerns

## Benefits

Stay Interviews can help to

- reverse/avert the turnover process and its associated costs.
- enhance the supervisor-employee relationship.
- increase employee productivity.
- strengthen organizational commitment.

## Exit Interview Comparison

Stay Interviews are different from exit interviews. An exit interview occurs after an employee has decided to leave so the organization can understand the reasons for leaving. The Stay Interview occurs to help prevent that employee from deciding to leave in the first place. The following table highlights the major differences between the two tools.

### EXIT INTERVIEWS

- Reactive
- Conducted by human resources
- Focus on a former employee already lost
- Results are summarized across employees
- Guide broad employee retention efforts (e.g., organizational programs)
- Generally take time, analysis, and upper management approval to be actionable

### STAY INTERVIEWS

- Proactive (preventative)
- Conducted by the supervisor
- Focus on a current employee you want to keep
- Results are specific to one employee
- Guide individual employee retention efforts (e.g., "Stay Plans")
- Generally actionable immediately at the supervisor level

*Jane supervises a unit in a County of Los Angeles department. She was surprised when three of her staff members left the unit within a 3-month period; she did not know if or how she could have prevented these separations.*

*One employee transferred to another division, one promoted to a different County department even though there was a vacancy in Jane's unit, and one resigned to work for another local agency.*

*Jane noticed changes in her remaining employees' attention to detail and enthusiasm about their work. She also found herself spending much of her time interviewing candidates to fill the vacancies and training the one replacement employee she had been able to hire.*

*With the decreasing number of experienced employees in her unit, Jane wondered what she could do to retain her talented staff.*



As described in the comparison table, human resources can orchestrate broad organizational employee retention solutions. However, the most effective retention actions occur at the individual level between you and each of your employees. Stay Interviews offer useful insights you can use right away to engage and retain your valued employees. They enable the progression of retention from one-size-fits-all programs to *customized retention strategies* (e.g., “Stay Plans”) for each employee.

“It is evident that in the ‘world of retention efforts,’ **one size does not fit all.**”

-Kenexa Research Institute

## Stay Interview Success Stories

The following companies have found great success using Stay Interviews to enhance employee retention.

- **NOVO 1**

The Fort Worth, Texas customer contact center sends managers to a 90-minute, interactive Stay Interview training that includes information on how to conduct the interview to feel more like a conversation than a formal interview. Stay Interviews, which the company conducts on an annual basis, have helped the company reduce turnover by 20 percent.

- **WEBROOT SOFTWARE**

The Broomfield, Colorado Internet security product development company implemented Stay Interviews immediately following a reduction in force, a period during which the company usually faced a spike in turnover. After conducting the Stay Interviews, turnover actually *decreased* rather than increased.

- **HILTON**

The international hotel chain’s five call centers averaged 55% annual turnover, and 50% of new agents failed to reach 90 days of employment. By requiring managers to send a 90-day retention report to the CEO and conduct Stay Interviews with new hires at 30 and 90 days of employment, the company reduced turnover by 50% in four months.

- **BURCHAM HILLS**

The East Lansing, Michigan retirement community began conducting Stay Interviews for nurses after 30 days of employment and annually for veteran employees. As a result, turnover among veteran nurses decreased by 72 percent.

It was initially “difficult to get managers to dedicate the time...however, when they realized the impact stay interviews had on retention, they felt **they would rather spend time getting acquainted and developing rapport with existing employees** than recruiting, interviewing and training new employees.”

– Burcham Hills Retirement Community HR Director

# FRAMEWORK FOR CONDUCTING STAY INTERVIEWS

---

As noted in Talent Management Magazine, conducting a successful Stay Interview entails more than asking your employee, “Are you leaving?” or “What can I do to make you stay?” The following section of this *Guide* will present information to guide you in properly conducting Stay Interviews.

“In an effective Stay Interview, managers ask standard, **structured questions** in a casual manner with a conversational tone.”

— *Who Will Stay and Who Will Go?*  
Society for Human Resources Management

## Sample Questions

The following are some sample questions that can help you obtain meaningful information from your employee:

- What attracted you to this job?
- What has influenced you to stay here (i.e., your stay factors)?
- What are your “job makers” and “job breakers”?
- How are your work relationships with your colleagues?
- What makes for a great day at work?
- What one thing would you change about your job?
- What might entice you to look for another job?
- What are the strengths of our working relationship? Are there things we could do differently to improve it?
- What can I do to make your job more satisfying?
- What makes it challenging for you to perform your work?
- What would keep you enthusiastic about this job?
- What about your work makes you proud?
- What untapped talents or skills would you like to use or develop?
- How do you prefer to be recognized for a job well done?
- How do you feel you can still grow in this job? Is that the kind of challenge you want? If not, what challenges do you seek?

A useful guideline to follow is to select about six questions that you feel comfortable asking. As the conversation naturally flows, adjust your questions based on each employee’s responses and displayed level of comfort.

## Guidelines on Timing

As the Stay Interview is meant to prevent turnover, it is important for you to conduct it *before* an employee becomes dissatisfied or decides to leave. In fact, *regularly* scheduled Stay Interviews ranked among the list of ideal work setting characteristics in a recent Human Capital Institute survey. As a general guideline, you should plan to conduct Stay Interviews at least once a year<sup>5</sup> and whenever an employee

- joins your team (the Stay Interview can be a seamless extension of your onboarding efforts).
- raises a concern or displays signs of disengagement (e.g., increased absenteeism).
- faces a dramatic work or personal life change (e.g., sudden high turnover on the team).
- experiences what you think or know to be a trigger for him/her (see examples in diagram on page 6).

Additionally, keep in mind that the Stay Interview is not intended to be an opportunity to evaluate the employee’s work performance and should not occur with a regular performance evaluation.

---

<sup>5</sup> Conduct interviews more often depending on any typical turnover patterns for specific classifications you supervise.

## Participants

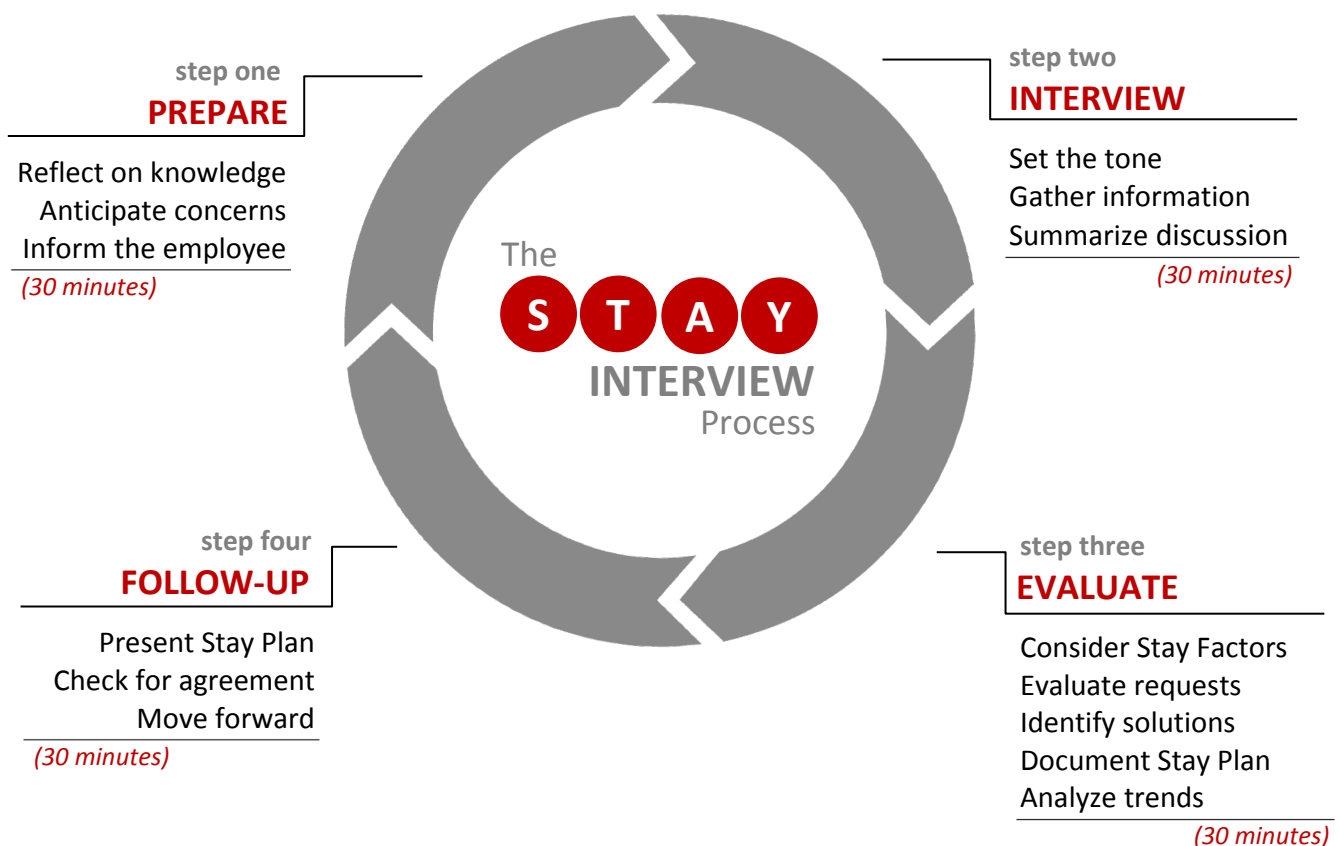
Consider conducting Stay Interviews with all of your employees.

## Time Commitment

It takes approximately two hours per employee to conduct the Stay Interview process<sup>6</sup>. However, consider the number of hours you spend dealing with employee relations, discipline, replacement hiring, and other similar types of issues. Conducting the Stay Interview process could prevent these time-consuming issues from arising, which translates to potentially significant time savings for you beyond the two-hour commitment.

## Process

As shown below and described on the next few pages, there are four main steps of a Stay Interview process. Each step builds upon the previous step and impacts the overall success of the process.



Because the Stay Interview is meant to be a personalized approach, it may be necessary to complete the process more than once each year for a given employee in order to achieve the goal of enhanced employee satisfaction, engagement, and commitment.

<sup>6</sup> It may take longer depending on other factors (e.g., work relationship/professional familiarity with the employee; type of requests made; resources needed to implement follow-up actions).

**PREPARE**

Effectively preparing for the Stay Interview will make the process more comfortable for you and the employee. This section will describe the ways to prepare.

□ **Reflect on What You Know**

Before you meet with the employee, gather your thoughts about your work relationship with him/her. Questions to guide your reflection include the following:

- How long has this employee worked for me and grown professionally during this time?
- How have the employee's contributions been valuable to me as a supervisor? To the team?
- Has this employee ever voiced concerns about work (e.g., frustrations or disappointments)? What have I done about them? What can I still do about them?
- When and what was this employee's last assignment or project change?
- What is the next logical step in his/her career track? How can I help him/her be ready for it?

Your preparation should also involve some measure of self-reflection as a supervisor. Questions to guide your self-reflection include the following:

- What is unique about me as a supervisor?
- Why would this employee want to continue working with me?
- What am I providing to this employee that could impact his/her decision to stay or leave?
- What qualities of my best supervisor/manager do I demonstrate?
- What qualities of my worst supervisor/manager do I demonstrate?

This reflection raises your awareness and helps you identify your strengths and the areas that you can improve to not only make your specific employee want to stay with your team, but also promote your team as a desirable option for other talented employees to seek out.

□ **Anticipate Concerns**

Although it is impossible to know the exact concerns your employee may have, you can anticipate *potential* concerns the employee may express so you can begin considering ways to address them. Listed below are some questions to help guide you:

- What concerns have employees raised in the past and how were they addressed?
- What aspects of this employee's job are/are not flexible?
- What resources am I able to put towards improving my employees' job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment?

□ **Inform the Employee**<sup>7</sup>

To increase the likelihood of a productive interaction, be sure to give your employee ample opportunity before the Stay Interview occurs to organize his/her thoughts. The Appendix provides a *Stay Interview Fact Sheet for Employees* that you can send to or discuss with your employee.

**Appendix A:**

.....

*Stay Interview  
Fact Sheet for  
Employees*

.....

<sup>7</sup> Participation in the Stay Interview process is voluntary. An employee can decline the invitation for a Stay Interview and opt to participate in the future.

**INTERVIEW**

The Stay Interview should be a positive and productive experience for you and your employee. This section will describe the way to structure the interview to help you achieve this goal.

□ **Set the Tone**

To begin the interview and build on the positive working relationship you have already developed with your employee,

- greet the employee and engage in small talk (e.g., ask how his/her day is going).
- express appreciation for the employee's efforts and achievements.
- review the Stay Interview process and set the agenda for the meeting.
- ask the employee if he/she has any questions about the Stay Interview process.

Also remember that the Stay Interview should feel more like a conversation than a formal interview. As the meeting environment can help encourage this feeling, consider that sitting *with* your employee at two comfortable chairs may be better than sitting across from him/her at your desk.

□ **Gather Information**

It is important to ask questions in a manner that will encourage your employee to openly and fully describe his/her stay factors, concerns, and requests. In combination with your own effective communication techniques, use the following approaches to gather information:

- Ask questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" response.
- Pose follow-up questions that show you are actively listening to the employee.
- Share specific examples of how you can address common workplace concerns.
- Take notes that you can review and evaluate after the interview.
- Focus more on hearing what your employee has to say than voicing your own perspective (i.e., listen more than you speak).
- Guide the employee, as necessary, to identifying his/her *most* important concerns and/or requests (e.g., the top 3-5 requests if the employee has a large number of them).

Additionally, be sensitive to and do not belittle concerns that may seem trivial to you. The power of Stay Interviews is that they can help you uncover subtle concerns that you may have underestimated or been unaware of that are important to your employee.

Note: Be sure to immediately address workplace violations (e.g., discrimination, harassment, theft, unsafe work behavior/conditions) the employee may discuss during the Stay Interview.

□ **Summarize the Discussion**

At the conclusion of the discussion,

- thank the employee for sharing.
- review what was discussed and ask if there is anything else the employee would like to share.
- let the employee know you will consider what he/she shared.
- schedule and provide an overview of the follow-up meeting.

**Appendix B:**

.....

***Stay Interview  
Sample  
Phraseology***

.....

The Appendix provides phraseology for portions of a sample Stay Interview that can help guide your responses when you conduct an actual Stay Interview.

After your meeting with the employee, evaluate the information he/she shared. This section will describe the important actions for making your evaluation.

## □ Consider Stay Factors

Review the stay factors the employee discussed and consider whether and how you can maintain those stay factors for the employee.

## □ Evaluate Requests

Analyze each request individually to ensure each is given proper consideration. Ask yourself the following questions in relation to each request:

- What does this mean to the employee?
- Is it appropriate for his/her level?
- What will this cost to implement?
- How will this affect other employees?
- How will this improve his/her work contribution?
- Does this fit within County/departmental policies?

To help validate the employee’s concern if you are unable to fulfill a specific request, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is my reason for denying this request?
- What is the underlying concern that led my employee to make this request?
- Is there an alternative way I can address the underlying concern?
- Can I modify the original request? Can I make fulfilling the request an incentive/reward if the employee achieves a specified goal (i.e., works to earn what he/she requested)?

## □ Identify Solutions

You may find that an employee will raise a concern without being able to make a specific request of you to resolve it. In these cases, you will need to identify a solution to propose to the employee. The Appendix provides a summary of potential solutions to resolve common employee concerns.

### Appendix C:

.....

*Potential Solutions to  
Common Concerns*

### Appendix D:

.....

*Sample Stay Plan*

.....

## □ Document Stay Plan

Documenting the information shared during the Stay Interview and your resulting evaluation in a “Stay Plan” can help solidify the process and commitment **YOU** are making to the employee. The Stay Plan can include the following information: stay factors, concerns, requests, and actions that will be implemented. The Appendix provides a sample Stay Plan.

## □ Analyze Trends

Conducting Stay Interviews can provide valuable information for improving your overall unit, section, division, and/or department. If you notice a pattern or theme of similar concerns raised by multiple employees, share this information with your supervisor and departmental HR office for possible broader response and action beyond the individual employee level. The following is a list of possible themes for you to track:

- Safety concerns
- Problems with co-workers
- Need for recognition
- Availability of resources (e.g., training requests)

Conducting Stay Interviews is only as valuable as your follow-up actions. This section will describe the important steps for following up with your employee.

#### □ **Present Stay Plan**

As you discuss your evaluation of the information shared during the interview, let the employee know how you made your decisions (e.g., that you considered each concern and request individually and attempted to find alternative solutions when you could not fulfill a specific request).

As you explain each approved request, describe how it

- addresses one or more of the employee's specific concerns.
- will be fulfilled (e.g., timeframe for being implemented and any limits).

As you explain each unapproved request,

- provide a reason it was not approved.
- discuss the alternative solution you identified, if any.
- allow the employee to accept, reject, or propose a new solution.

Additionally, keep in mind that the foundation of the Stay Interview process is the *interaction* between you and your employee. Use the Stay Plan to help guide your follow-up conversation and serve as talking points; do not simply send or show the document to your employee. You may find it useful to provide the Stay Plan to your employee during or after the follow-up meeting.

#### □ **Check for Mutual Agreement**

Both you and your employee should mutually agree with the Stay Plan. If your employee directly or indirectly indicates dissatisfaction with one or more parts of the Stay Plan,

- ask questions to clarify your employee's position (e.g., "Can you help me understand the importance of this request?").
- rephrase what the employee says to verify your understanding of his/her position.
- take notes and use the information to develop other solutions.
- involve the employee in developing solutions by explaining the criteria you used to evaluate his/her original request and asking for recommendations that adhere to them.

#### □ **Move Forward**

Follow the steps below to close the follow-up meeting:

- Thank the employee for his/her time.
- Ask if your employee has any concerns.
- Express appreciation for the employee.
- Ask the employee to agree to let you know of any changes to his/her intent to leave or stay so you can work to keep him/her.

Afterward, ensure that you follow through on your commitments. Observe behaviors and look for

signs that the employee is more satisfied and engaged (e.g., actively participating with the team).

Periodically check in with your employee to ensure that the Stay Plan is effective in achieving its goals.

"It is critical that the information gleaned from stay interviews leads to visible action and isn't just filed away...**trust** is essential for stay interviews to have value."

— *Issues of Merit*

U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board

# CONCLUSION

## Overcoming Challenges

The table below summarizes some of the challenges you may face and ways to overcome them for a successful Stay Interview implementation.

CHALLENGE	DESCRIPTION	WAYS TO OVERCOME
<b><i>Fulfilling Requests</i></b>	Problems may arise if you cannot fulfill a request	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be upfront about the process and your evaluation criteria</li><li>• Explain why the request cannot be fulfilled</li><li>• Offer alternatives, when possible</li></ul>
<b><i>Perceived Preferential Treatment</i></b>	Disharmony results among your team because you approve a request for one employee but deny that same request made by another employee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure that your approval or denial of requests is based on employees' individual circumstances and merited by their position, performance, and needs</li></ul>
<b><i>Loss of Time</i></b>	The process requires you and the employee to take time from your schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Familiarize yourself with the process and general guidelines for evaluating requests</li><li>• Use day-to-day conversations with employees as informal Stay Interviews to maintain awareness of employee needs and concerns</li><li>• Focus on the benefits of enhancing the employee's job satisfaction, engagement, and/or commitment to the unit's productivity as a result of investing time in Stay Interviews</li></ul>
<b><i>Awkwardness</i></b>	It can be difficult to discuss an employee's concerns and the possibility he/she is seeking employment elsewhere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Educate employees and yourself on the process</li><li>• Hold the meeting in a private area</li><li>• Focus on how the process will lead to improvements</li><li>• Incorporate informal Stay Interviews into day-to-day conversations so they become more natural</li></ul>
<b><i>Complaints about You</i></b>	It may be hard for an employee to express, and for you to hear, concerns about your management style and/or behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask the employee if there is anything you can do to be a better supervisor</li><li>• View issues raised as areas for improvement rather than complaints</li><li>• Ask for examples to help you understand the employee's perspective in a specific situation or context</li></ul>



## Effective Supervisory Skills and Practices

In addition to using the information presented in this *Guide*, you should apply the supervisory skills and practices employed during the Stay Interview process throughout your unit to increase your employees' job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment.

- **Communication** – be open and receptive to employees, use Stay Interviews, daily interactions, and clearly defined goals to open and enhance lines of communication.
- **Recognition** – use formal and informal recognition programs to show employees they are appreciated and provide feedback on their performance.
- **Meaning** – show employees they are performing meaningful work by explaining how it affects the County and members of the community, as well as how it fits into County and departmental goals.

## Final Thoughts

Stay Interviews are about more than having a series of meetings with your employees. They are about building a comfortable, open, and trusting relationship with each one of your employees. As stated in the American Management Association's *The Seven Hidden Reasons Employees Leave*, "this takes courage, an ability to be self-reflective, and more frequent contact and emotional involvement with the employee." Although it may not always be possible to prevent or delay an employee from leaving, Stay Interviews help you take ownership of your role in retention management for your team.

"A worker's satisfaction with his or her boss, the **quality of the exchanges between them**, and fair treatment by supervisors are related to retention."

– *Retaining Talent*  
Society for Human Resources Management



# STAY INTERVIEW FACT SHEET FOR EMPLOYEES

## **What is a Stay Interview?**

A Stay Interview is a one-on-one discussion with your direct supervisor about your level of job satisfaction and commitment to stay as a member of your work team.

## **What is the purpose of a Stay Interview?**

Your supervisor appreciates you and values the work you do. He/she wants to ensure that you are satisfied with your job so that you are encouraged to stay with your work team.

## **What happens during a Stay Interview?**

Your supervisor will ask questions about your reasons for staying with your work team and the work-related factors that may cause you to consider leaving. Your supervisor will take notes so he/she can review what you discuss to determine how he/she can help maintain or increase your job satisfaction.

## **How should you prepare for a Stay Interview?**

Ask yourself the following questions to help prepare:

- What do I appreciate most about my current position? What do I like least?
- On a day-to-day basis, does my current position meet my needs?
- On a broader scale, does my position meet my needs for achieving my career aspirations?
- What challenges or concerns do I have with my...
  - workload (e.g., level of autonomy and challenge)?
  - development (e.g., career planning and training opportunities)?
  - work environment (e.g., workspace location and well-being)?
  - access to information (e.g., feedback and recognition preferences)?
  - access to necessary resources (e.g., tools and equipment)?
  - work relationships (e.g., interactions with your supervisor and co-workers)?
- How can my supervisor help address those challenges and concerns?
- What, if anything, would have to change about my position to keep me satisfied?

## **What will happen after the Stay Interview?**

After meeting with you, your supervisor will evaluate and determine what changes he/she can make to help address the issues you discussed. Keep in mind that your supervisor may not be able to create your perfectly ideal job as a result of knowing about those issues, but he/she will make a sincere effort to maintain or increase your job satisfaction.

## **Will the information you share be recorded in your personnel file or performance evaluations?**

Unless you bring up any information related to workplace violations or behave unprofessionally, the Stay Interview is an independent process.

## **How long does the interview last?**

The Stay Interview lasts approximately 30 minutes.

**Note:** Participation in the Stay Interview process is voluntary. You can decline the invitation for a Stay Interview and opt to participate in the future.

# STAY INTERVIEW

## SAMPLE PHRASEOLOGY

### To begin the conversation

*Robert, I'm so glad we are going to have an opportunity to talk today about your work here in the Research Unit. You've been with us for 3 years now and have become a very valuable member of our team. I want to make sure I'm doing what I can to help you build a rewarding career for yourself here. I'd like to ask you a few questions to help me understand where you are in terms of the job and what I might be able to do to keep you here. Would you mind if I took a few notes?*

### To probe

*Can you help me better understand that situation? I want to know where you are coming from so I can find a way to make things better for you.*

...

*That's a difficult situation you're dealing with. I will do my best to figure something out. Let me ask, how important is this to you on a day-to-day basis? If I am not able to find a practical solution, is this something that might make you think about leaving our work team?*

...

*I hear you saying that you like everyone you work with as individuals, but that you would like to see them work together better as a team. Can you give me some examples of where teamwork could be improved?*

...

*Okay, that's a very specific request you're making. If I were to approve your request, how would it change things for you?*

### To identify an alternative solution

*Let's work together on finding a solution. What type of change might improve this issue?*

### To re-direct conversation to factors within your control

*Robert, I understand that you want to earn more money for the work you are currently performing. Thank you for your hard work and dedication. I would like our focus to be on issues I can help you with in your day-to-day work.*

### To summarize

*What you've told me is very helpful. It sounds like you truly enjoy working for the Research Unit in general, especially because of the flexibility and influence you have over your work, but you're feeling like you're not being challenged enough. Is that a fair restatement of what you have said?*

### To close the conversation

*Thank you for meeting with me, Robert. If something happens to make you think about leaving, please come and talk with me. Please give me the opportunity to work to keep you as a member of my team. Can you agree to that?*

## POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS TO COMMON CONCERNS

The tables below describe potential solutions to address common concerns raised during Stay Interviews. Review this information to help evaluate how you can improve your employee's job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment.

***Note:** These are potential solutions only. Before proposing or implementing any solution, carefully consider the specific benefit(s), feasibility, and any limits regarding its use (e.g., budget and policy constraints).*

CONCERN	SOLUTION	POTENTIAL ACTION
<b>Workload</b>	More Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve employee in project planning process</li> <li>• Determine due dates with employee</li> <li>• Let employee determine how to complete projects and assignments to meet performance expectations</li> </ul>
	Less Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more precise direction</li> <li>• Check in regularly to monitor progress</li> <li>• Help employee build skills to self-manage</li> </ul>
	More Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more difficult projects (e.g., build something new and/or unique)</li> <li>• Assign a higher volume of projects</li> </ul>
	Choice of Projects/ Assignments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a list of future projects</li> <li>• Consult with employee regarding interests and preferences</li> </ul>
CONCERN	SOLUTION	POTENTIAL ACTION
<b>Development</b>	Career Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss employee's goals</li> <li>• Map out path of possible advancement and enrichment to achieve those goals</li> <li>• Determine what additional skills and/or experiences are necessary to move into each position</li> </ul>
	More Training Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage and allow employee to attend County sponsored programs related to his/her career path</li> <li>• Consider suggesting free learning opportunities the employee could pursue during and/or away from work (e.g., webinars and MOOCs – Massive Open Online Courses)</li> </ul>

CONCERN	SOLUTION	POTENTIAL ACTION
<b>Information</b>	More Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide regular feedback on work the employee is performing</li> <li>• Acknowledge when things are going well</li> <li>• Provide suggestions for improvements, when needed</li> </ul>
	More Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell employee when he/she has done well</li> <li>• Create small notes or awards to give out for superior performance</li> <li>• Mention employee achievements at staff meetings</li> <li>• Remember that recognition can be meaningful when large or small</li> </ul>
	More Knowledge of Team's Goals and Current Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold regular staff meetings</li> <li>• Meet with employee individually to provide information on the team's goals and projects</li> <li>• Maintain and share an assignment/project log</li> <li>• Require employees to upload project information and materials to an accessible, shared location (e.g., network shared drive or project binder)</li> </ul>
	More Knowledge of Department Goals and Current Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet with employee individually to provide information on departmental goals</li> <li>• Encourage employee to talk to other employees within the department about their projects</li> </ul>

CONCERN	SOLUTION	POTENTIAL ACTION
<b>Access to Necessary Resources</b>	Add Equipment to Workspace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide employee with necessary tools (e.g., safety equipment, file organizers, tools) in his/her workspace</li> </ul>
	Make it Easier to Locate and Contact Individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a shared directory of contact information</li> <li>• Provide necessary contact facilitation tools (e.g., email or long distance calling card)</li> <li>• Provide access to appropriate media (e.g., Internet) for locating individuals' contact information</li> </ul>
	Address Technology Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide hardware and software/applications that match the needs of the employee's work</li> <li>• Ensure employee's software/applications are up-to-date (e.g., the latest versions)</li> <li>• Ensure employee's software/applications are compatible with the software/applications of other individuals with whom the employee sends or receives work</li> </ul>

CONCERN	SOLUTION	POTENTIAL ACTION
<b>Role Confusion</b>	Clarify Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create and/or provide an up-to-date role description, which includes the role purpose and scope; duties performed and services provided; reporting relationships; interactions with other roles; and key performance expectations</li> <li>• Hold regular team meetings to enable employees to discuss any potential role conflict</li> </ul>
	Ensure Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid making the employee accountable on a long-term basis to more than one immediate supervisor to reduce potential conflict in work demands</li> <li>• Avoid placing inconsistent demands on the employee</li> <li>• Ensure that the requirements of different assignments and projects (e.g., skill or knowledge base) are compatible, when possible</li> <li>• Ensure assignments and projects match the employee's role</li> </ul>

# SAMPLE STAY PLAN

Robert Ross

Employee Name

Jane Morales

Supervisor Name

Administrative Analyst

Employee Job Title

Research Unit

Unit/Work Team

March 16, 2015

Date of Stay Interview

March 26, 2015

Date of Follow-Up Meeting

Did the employee agree to notify the supervisor of changes to his/her intent to stay or leave? ☒ YES ☐ NO

## STAY FACTOR(S) DISCUSSED (summary bullets)

1. Flexibility
2. Influence over work product
3. Short commute
4. Friendships established with two of his co-workers

## CONCERN(S) DISCUSSED (summary bullets)

1. Leaving work late because of team meetings scheduled for 4:00pm and later
2. Co-workers do not provide proper support
3. Doing too much clerical instead of analytical work
4. Not being challenged enough

## RESPONSES TO EMPLOYEE REQUEST(S)

### 1. Request: Do not schedule meetings to start after 3:00pm

Addresses: Concern #1

I cannot approve Robert's request to not schedule meetings after 3:00pm because the nature of our work is such that most team members are often off-site until late afternoon. I will continue to schedule team meetings to occur when most team members are in the office. However, beginning immediately, I will ensure that team meetings conclude by 5:00pm (e.g., stick to the agenda, constrain long-winded commentaries).

### 2. Request: Advise the team on how to properly give feedback

Addresses: Concern #2

I have contacted the Employee Development Division about training the team on giving feedback. The Learning Management System has a module on this topic, and I will require all team members to complete it by April 30, 2015. I will also monitor feedback given between team members for a short period thereafter to check for improvements.

### 3. Request: Hire clerical support for the team

Addresses: Concern #3

Our team does not have a budgeted vacancy for a clerical position. However, I will speak with the division manager about whether and how the team can obtain greater assistance with clerical tasks from the division secretaries and support staff.

## OTHER RESPONSES

4. I will gradually assign Robert work from other functional areas of our unit. As we discussed, Robert sees learning something new as a welcomed challenge. This action is contingent on Robert continuing to complete his current work with the same high standards.

Addresses: Concern #4

5. I will continue to support the stay factors Robert discussed.

Addresses: N/A

**AGREEMENT** – This Plan is intended to enhance the employee's job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment. Both supervisor and employee are responsible for fulfilling their roles to achieve these goals.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### **Angela C. Hawkins**

Human Resources Analyst IV

Angela holds an MBA and has over 13 years of public-sector human resources experience involving succession and workforce planning; recruitment and selection; survey and training program development and implementation; and other human resources activities. She has presented at a regional conference sponsored by the International Public Management Association – Human Resources and has been published in its publication.

### **Marc C. Shartzner**

Principal Analyst, Human Resources

Marc holds an M.S. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology and professional certificates in Human Resources Management, Project Management, Technical Writing, and Business Management. He has over 15 years of professional experience in public, private, and consulting organizations. His areas of practice include selection research and test development, succession and workforce planning, organizational surveys, recruitment, training, compensation administration, and other human resources activities. He has presented at regional and international conferences and has been published in professional journals.

#### Additional Contributors

Sara Lupo

Cory Wilkin

Teresa Tsang

Arman Depanian

Laura Guerrero-Nieto



## SOURCES

---

- Allen, D. G. (2008). *Retaining talent: A guide to analyzing and managing employee turnover*. Retrieved from Society for Human Resources Management website:  
<http://www.shrm.org/about/foundation/research/documents/retaining%20talent-%20final.pdf>
- Branham, L., & Saratoga Institute. (2005). *The seven hidden reasons why employees leave: How to recognize the subtle signs and act before it's too late*. [Kindle version]. Retrieved from Amazon.com
- Corporate Executive Board. (2004). *Driving performance and retention through employee engagement: A quantitative analysis of effective engagement strategies*. Retrieved from  
<http://www.usc.edu/programs/cwfl/assets/pdf/Employee%20engagement.pdf>
- Finnegan, R. P. (2012). *The power of stay interviews for engagement and retention*. [Kindle version]. Retrieved from Amazon.com
- Herman, A. E. (2010). *Understanding retention: One size doesn't fit all*. New York, NY: Kenexa Research Institute.
- Human Capital Institute. (2013). *The trifecta of engagement: The organization, the manager, and the employee*. Retrieved from <http://www.hci.org/hr-research/trifecta-engagement-organization-manager-and-employee>
- Kalman, F. (2012, June 5). *How to measure engagement with a stay interview*. Retrieved from Talent Management Magazine website: <http://www.talentmgt.com/articles/how-to-measure-engagement-with-a-stay-interview>
- Sherman, D., Alper, W., & Wolfson, A. (2001). *The retention dilemma: why productive workers leave – seven suggestions for keeping them*. Retrieved from Hay Group website:  
[http://www.haygroup.com/downloads/my/Retention\\_Dilemma.pdf](http://www.haygroup.com/downloads/my/Retention_Dilemma.pdf)
- Towers-Watson. (2012). *2012 Global Workforce Study. Engagement at risk: Driving strong performance in a volatile global environment*. Retrieved from <http://towerswatson.com/assets/pdf/2012-Towers-Watson-Global-Workforce-Study.pdf>
- Tyler, K. (2011, December). Who will stay and who will go? *HR Magazine*, 56(12). Retrieved from  
<http://www.shrm.org/publications/hrmagazine/editorialcontent/2011/1211/pages/1211tylerb.aspx>
- U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, Office of Policy and Evaluation. (2013, February). Stay interviews: listen to your valued employees so you can keep them. *Issues of Merit*. 18(1). Retrieved from  
<http://www.mspb.gov/netsearch/viewdocs.aspx?docnumber=798916&version=801999&application=ACROBAT>