

# Stay Interview:

## A How-To Guide

### About stay interviews

A “stay interview” is a periodic one-on-one structured discussion between a manager and an employee. It’s a conversation to identify and reinforce factors that drive an individual employee’s retention and engagement. Using this proactive interview tactic lets your star performers know how much they matter and goes a long way toward improving retention rates. In addition to these benefits, the advantages behind stay interviews (should you need to explain their purpose to others) are listed below.

#### ADVANTAGES:

**Stimulating** – most employees are excited by the fact that the broader organization is concerned about their future and that their manager takes time to consult with them.

**Personal** – unlike engagement surveys and other retention tools focused on what excites a large number of employees this approach is customized to a single identifiable individual, their experiences, and preferences.

**Exclusive and Efficient** – focusing stay discussions exclusively on key employees (especially those at risk of leaving or being wooed away) reduces the time a manager needs to devote to retention.

**Actionable** – unlike exit interviews which only identify problems, stay interviews encourage both parties to identify actions that can improve the employee’s experience as well as actions that can help eliminate major frustrations or turnover triggers.

**Positive** – most of the interview is focused on identifying and reinforcing positive factors the employee enjoys most about their job. Although some negative factors may be covered they’re not the primary focus.

**Emotion Less** – since discussions occur before an employee has decided to consider options elsewhere, conversations are typically calm and emotionally composed.

**Pressure Less** – because the employee is not actively interviewing for a job, there’s less time sensitivity and pressure on the manager to quickly resolve retention issues.



## How-to guide overview

Effective stay interview techniques are easy to learn and cost nothing to implement. This TalentMap Stay Interview How-To Guide was created as a simple and efficient resource for HR practitioners and managers at large. Consisting of five parts, it provides a step-by-step series of questions to guide meaningful conversations and fruitful outcomes. Feel free to add, exclude, and customize questions based on your own employee constituents.

### Step 1: Starting the Conversation

- Approaching the employee
- Beginning the stay interview

### Step 2: Identify factors that make the employee want to stay and engage

- Positive stay factors
- Reasons you give to others
- “Best work of your life”
- Job impact factors
- Skill utilization factors
- Feeling listened to and valued

### Step 3: Identify retention-related factors that might increase engagement

- Better managed/manage differently?
- More positive elements and fewer less desirable ones
- Dream job?
- Where would you like to be in X years?
- Challenge factors
- How do you like to be recognized?
- Exposure to executives
- Learning, growth, and leadership

### Step 4: Identify possible triggers that may cause employees to leave

- Job and organization triggers
- Recent frustrations
- Impact of co-workers’ “reason to leave”
- Past triggers

### Step 5: Concluding the conversation





## Step 1: Start the conversation

When an employee is asked to “sit down for a talk” the request can be unsettling and lead to unnecessary worry. The first step in starting a conversation is to assert the value you place on the individual and by extension, their insights. The following are a few suggestions to help you get the conversation started.

### APPROACHING THE EMPLOYEE

Approach the employee during a lull period. Use an introductory statement something along this line:

“I want you to know the organization, and myself, appreciate your commitment and recognize the great work you’ve been doing. When you have a few minutes, I’d like to have an informal conversation to make sure we fully understand what factors contribute to your loyalty and keep you here, and to explore any possible actions we can take to bolster your job experience and keep you happy.”

### BEGINNING THE INTERVIEW

Open the stay interview with a simple introductory statement like the following:

“Thanks for taking the time to have this discussion. Because you’re one of our key employees, I want to ask you a few informal questions to help me understand the factors that cause you to enjoy and stay in your current role. During this time, we’ll also talk about anything that could possibly frustrate you to the point where you might even begin to consider other job opportunities. As we chat I’ll be taking notes so that I have something to keep me on track, on your behalf, going forward.”



## Step 2: Identify factors that make the employee want to stay

The following questions are to help you and your employee explore reasons that make the organization and their job a compelling fit, currently. This discussion will provide some important insights about what makes this individual tick and how you can tap into these factors to help with their retention (and possibly others as well).

1. To start off, tell me why you enjoy your current job and work situation? What factors contribute to your staying with the organization? (such as people, job, rewards, job content, coworkers, management etc.) Help me identify the factors that make you more passionate and loyal to your team and the organization.
2. If you've ever been asked by a close friend about this place, or have been contacted by an external recruiter, what reasons have you given for wanting to stay here at [organization name]?
3. Do you feel you're currently doing "the best work of your life?" What factors could contribute to you "doing the best work of your life?"  
(Note: this is the No.1 key retention factor for top performers).
4. Do you feel your work makes a difference in the organization? That externally it has a noticeable impact on customers and the world? Do you feel your coworkers think you make a difference?  
(Note: this is the No.2 key retention factor for top performers.)
5. Do you feel "fully utilized" in your current role? What factors make you feel fully utilized? Are there additional things we can do to put your skills, talents, and interests to greater use?
6. Do your colleagues and teammates listen to you and do they value your ideas, inputs, and decisions? How can that area be improved?





## Step 3: Identify retention-related actions to increase engagement

At this stage in the conversation you want to understand as explicitly as possible what motivates the employee, gives them self-worth, and inspires them to achieve more. The following questions will help you unearth the sorts of things that elevate engagement for this individual, so that you can help to motivate and facilitate their goals.

1. If you “managed yourself,” what would you do differently (in relation to managing “you”) that as your current manager I don’t do?
2. What elements or motivation factors in your current role do you like best (and would like to see more of)?
  - What factors would you miss most if transferred to a completely different job?
  - What things do you really miss from your last job here or elsewhere?
3. What less-desirable elements or frustrations in your current role would you like to do less of?
  - Are there any frustrations that keep you up at night, that enter your mind while driving to work, or that cause you to dread having to come to work at all?
4. If you were given the opportunity to redesign your current role, what would you include in your dream job?
5. Help us understand your career progression expectations. Where you would like to be in the organization two years from now?
6. What are the most challenging but exciting aspects of your current job?
  - Are there actions we can take to further challenge you?
7. Tell me about any recognition or acknowledgment you’ve received that increased your commitment and loyalty.
  - What kinds of actions can we take to further recognize you?
8. What kind of exposure have you had to our organization’s executives and decision makers lately?
  - Are there ways that we could increase or improve this exposure?
9. Tell me about your positive experiences around learning, development and growth?
  - Are there ways we could increase that growth?
  - Do you want to move into a leadership role, and if so, what are your expectations, timetable, and concerns?



## Step 4: Identify possible triggers that may cause the employee to leave

Triggers are occurrences or events that drive loyal employees to consider looking for a new job. A co-worker who gets away with doing the bare minimum can discourage high performers. Micro management can suffocate innovation; greater autonomy can drive it. The information gleaned from these questions will help you identify and address performance and retention obstacles.

Triggers are occurrences or events that drive loyal employees to consider looking for a new job.

1. If you were to ever begin to consider leaving, help me understand what kind of triggers or negative factors might cause you to consider leaving?
  - Please include both job and organization trigger factors.
2. Think back to a time in the last 12 months when you've been at least slightly frustrated or anxious about your work. What frustration factor or factors most contributed to that anxiety?
  - Help me understand what eventually happened to lower that frustration level?
3. If you've had conversations with employees who have considered leaving or have left our organization, did any of the reasons they provided for leaving cause you to partially nod in agreement?
  - If so, what were these reasons and why did they seem to be at least partially justifiable?
4. What were the prime factors that caused you to leave your last two jobs?
  - Are there factors from your previous jobs that you hope you'll never have to experience again at this organization?





## Step 5: Concluding the conversation

1. Briefly summarize takeaway highlights from the discussion as you perceive them.
2. Ask if you've missed or misinterpreted anything.
3. Explain how this information will be used to help shape the employee's future with the organization and guide retention directives in general.
4. Ask the employee if there were one single message they'd like you to take away from this discussion and pass on to the executive team what would it be?
5. Thank the employee for their insights during this conversation. Reiterate their value and importance to you and the organization at large. Conclude the meeting.





## About TalentMap

A thought leader focused exclusively on workplace engagement measurements and research, TalentMap is passionate about understanding the people behind organizational success: Employees.

Since its start in 1998, TalentMap has conducted thousands of employee engagement survey projects and surveyed more than one million employees. Working in partnership with public and private sector organizations of all sizes across North America, TalentMap's deep understanding of methodologies and assumptions unique to different sectors alongside volumes of benchmark data accrued over the years have become valued resources for organizations that value their people.

TalentMap employee engagement survey tools – readily customized from hire to retire – are based on years of research, field experience, and scientific measurement. The company also offers expert consulting services, deployment, data collection, analysis reporting, and post-survey action planning. It's a proprietary workplace intelligence process – developed and delivered by people-oriented people consumed with helping leadership teams and HR professionals create positive organizational change.

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