Conduct a “Engaged-Stay Interview” to Engage and Retain Your Employees

*Engaging ONE affects ALL and Stay Interviews provide the details to how to make that happen.*

Supervisors and managers play an important role in attracting and retaining talented employees. Engaged-Stay Interviews are a way to better understand what factors are engaging and motivating your employees to remain with the University and more about their work styles, work expectations, what is working, and what may be improved upon. Your goal when conducting such an interview is to engage and retain your high performing employees by building better relationships and making them feel valued and heard.

Engaged-Stay Interviews tend to be more casual and informal and are not necessarily meant to be conducted with every one of your employees, although you may do that. Rather, these are held with your high potential/performing employees in that their departure would have a significant negative effect on the performance, growth or services provided by your division/department. It cannot be over emphasized that these interviews are not performance appraisal or performance management in nature. While somewhat related, those are different discussions with distinct purposes.

You do not have to ask the same question of every employee you interview, but consistency will help you identify possible trends impacting employment. It is also helpful to hold the interviews around the same time period, so information is fresh and patterns can be better seen. It is also helpful to conduct these during a “lull” period in your operation.

Three suggested formats include:

- A one-on-one interview with your employee – Ask the employee questions during a face-to-face interview. This direct approach beats the other options hands down. Skype and telephone interviews are also acceptable as close alternatives.

- A one-on-one interview with HR – In cases where you may be reluctant to meet with the employee or where there are on-going issues, an HR staff member can be assigned to conduct the interview. Because they HR professionals are experienced interviewers; the results can in some cases more accurate and insightful. If you perceive this may be the case contact the human resources department for assistance in discussing the most appropriate approach.

- Questionnaires / Surveys provided to current employees – Providing these questions to a sample of the currently targeted employees with an electronic survey or questionnaire is also an acceptable option. This approach may be necessary for remotely located or shift employees. While this approach may be appropriate in some situations, it does involve more administrative logistics to complete the process.
Interview Process:

Approach the selected employee during a lull period and use an introductory statement along this line: “I want you to know that both the University and I appreciate your commitment to the institution and the great work that you have been doing. If you have a few minutes, I would like to have an informal conversation with you to ensure that we fully understand the factors that engage you and keep you here, and any possible actions that we can take to bolster your job experience and to keep you happy and support your growth in your current role and with your profession.”

Starting the interview – Start the interview with a simple introductory statement like the following: “Thanks for taking the time to have this discussion. As one of our key/high performing/potential employees, I want to informally pose some simple questions that can help me to understand the factors that enable you to enjoy, stay and maximize performance in your current role. “During the interview I will also use a series of questions in order to identify any factor that could possibly frustrate you to the point where you might even begin to consider other job opportunities.”

Below are factors to explore when conducting a Stay-Engaged Interview with your employees, with additional sample questions to consider or use. Again, these interviews are meant to be more casual and informal and typically do not exceed one hour.

Identify factors that make the employee want to stay

Positive stay factors – Tell me, specifically, what factors cause you to enjoy your current job and work situation (including people, job, rewards, job content, coworkers, management etc.), and, as a result, have contributed to your staying at our university as long as you have? Help us identify the factors that make you more passionate, committed, and loyal to your team and the university.

Reasons you give to others – If you have ever been asked by a close friend about another job or contacted by an external recruiter, can you tell me what reasons you gave them for wanting to remain with the university?

“Best work of your life” factors — Do you feel that you are currently doing “the best work of your life?” Can you list for me the factors that could contribute to you “doing the best for your life?” (Note: this is often cited as the No. 1 key retention factor for top performers.)

“Job impact” factors — Do you feel that your work makes a difference in the company and that externally it has a noticeable impact on customers and the world? Do you also feel that your coworkers think that you make a difference? (Note: this is often cited as the No.2 key retention factor for top performers.)

Fully utilized factors — Do you feel “fully utilized” in your current role? If so, can you identify the factors that make you feel fully utilized? Are there additional things that we can do to more fully take advantage of your talents and interests?

Are you listened to and feel valued — Do your colleagues and teammates listen to you and do they value your ideas, inputs, and decisions? How can that area be improved? Likewise, do you feel that I and management listen to you and value your ideas, inputs and decisions? How can I improve in that area?
Identify actions that might increase loyalty and commitment

Better managed – If you “managed yourself,” what would you do (in relation to managing “you”); that I, as your manager, don’t currently do?

More positive elements and fewer undesirable ones – Can you make a list of the elements or motivation factors in your current role that you like best and would like to see more of? What factors would you miss most if you were transferred to a completely different job? What things do you really miss from your previous job at your previous employer? Can you also make a list of the less desirable elements or frustrations in your current role that you would like to do “less of?” Are there any frustration factors 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?

Dream job – If you were given the opportunity to redesign your current role, can you make a list of the key factors that you would include in your “dream job?”

Where would you like to be – Can you help us understand your career progression expectations and let us know where you would like to be in the organization two years from now?

Challenge factors – Can you list for us the most challenging but exciting aspects of your current job situation? Are there actions that we can take to further challenge you?

Recognition – Can you highlight any recent recognition and acknowledgment that have increased your commitment and loyalty? Are there actions that we can take to further recognize you?

Exposure – Can you highlight the recent exposure to executives and decision makers that you have experienced? Are there ways that we could increase or improve that exposure?

Learning, growth, and leadership – Can you highlight for me your positive experiences in the area of learning, development, and growth? Are there ways where we could increase that growth? The employee should also be asked if they desire to move into a leadership role and, if so, about their expectations, their timetable, and their concerns.

Identify “triggers” that may cause employees to leave

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

Identify possible retention triggers – If you were ever to consider leaving … help me understand what kind of “triggers” or negative factors might be the cause. Please include both job and organization trigger factors.

Recent frustrations – Think back to a time in the last 12 months when you have been at least slightly frustrated or anxious about your current role. Can you list for me the frustration factor or factors that most contributed to that anxiety? Can you also help me understand what eventually happened to lower that frustration level?

Others made you think – If you’ve had conversations with other employees who have considered leaving or who have actually left our firm, did any of the reasons that they provided cause you to at least partially nod in
agreement? If so, can you list those factors and tell me why they seemed to be somewhat justifiable as a reason for leaving to you?

**Past triggers** – What are the prime factors that caused you to leave your last two jobs? Are there factors from your previous jobs that you hope you will never have to experience again at our organization?

Here are some additional questions for consideration to ask as appropriate:

- What keeps you here?
- What might entice you away to another job?
- What would you like to change about your job?
- What would you like to change about your team or department?
- What would make your job more satisfying and rewarding?
- What challenges you in your work?
- What kind of feedback would be most helpful for you? How often would you prefer feedback?
- What skills and talents would you like to contribute every day?
- What things would you like to start and/or stop doing?
- What keeps you motivated?
- What kind of recognition would be meaningful to you?
- What style of communication and leadership do you respond to best?
- What new things would you like to learn this year?
- How are we helping you learn and further develop your skills?
- What are your current job and career goals? What can I do to support your goals?
- As your manager, what can I do to help you be happier and more successful at work?
- What did you love in your last position that you are not doing now?
What makes for a great day at work?

If you changed your job completely what would you miss most?

If you won the lottery and didn’t have to work, what would you miss?

If you had a magic wand, what would be the one thing you would change about your work, your role and responsibilities?

What’s bothering you most about your job?

What do you think about on your way to work?

For questions: Contact Ken Pinnock