

# Stay interviews framework

## Overview

Stay interviews are structured, proactive conversations with current employees designed to uncover what keeps them engaged - and what might cause them to leave. This guide helps HR teams and managers conduct meaningful stay interviews that lead to real action and improved retention.

Use this guide to build trust, prevent attrition, and shape a more responsive employee experience.

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## 1. What stay interviews are (and why they matter)

Stay interviews are NOT performance reviews or exit interviews. They're future-focused: designed to understand what's working for employees and what could be improved before issues escalate. They show that the company cares - and is willing to act on feedback.

Why they matter:

- Proactively reduce turnover
  - Surface early warning signs of disengagement
  - Build manager-employee trust
  - Shape retention strategies based on real data
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## 2. Who should run them and when

Who:

- Ideally conducted by the direct manager (with training and support from HR)

- In sensitive cases, HR may lead

**When:**

- Annually, bi-annually, or at key career moments (e.g., after 6 months, post-promotion)
- NOT tied to performance reviews or compensation conversations

*Tip: Spread interviews out over a quarter to reduce admin pressure and avoid “check-the-box” fatigue.*

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### 3. How to prepare for a stay interview

Use the checklist below to ensure the interview is meaningful and productive, and to help the employee feel psychologically safe and supported. Thoughtful preparation helps the conversation feel intentional – not rushed or performative – and increases the likelihood of honest, actionable insights.

**Checklist:**

- Schedule a dedicated 30–45 minute session, giving at least a week’s notice
- Choose a neutral and comfortable setting – avoid back-to-back meetings or high-pressure environments
- Set expectations in advance: “This isn’t a performance review – it’s about your experience and how we can help you thrive here”
- Let the employee know they are encouraged to speak freely and honestly, and that their feedback is valued and confidential
- Review the employee’s recent project history, performance feedback, and any previous pulse survey results or exit trends from their department
- Prepare 4–6 open-ended questions – but be flexible based on how the conversation evolves

- Reflect on any feedback you've received as a manager and be prepared to listen without reacting defensively

**Tip:** Bring a notepad to jot down key themes, but avoid typing throughout - keep eye contact and maintain natural flow.

#### 4. Questions to ask (with examples)

Choose 4–6 questions across categories to guide the conversation, and adapt based on the employee's role, tenure, and personality.

Core categories and sample questions:

Core category	Sample questions
What keeps you here?	"What do you look forward to each day at work?" "What part of your role energizes you most?" "When was the last time you felt really proud of your work?" "What makes you feel valued on this team?"
What might make you leave?	"What might tempt you to look for another job?" "Have you ever seriously considered leaving - and why?" "If a recruiter called tomorrow, what might make you take the call?" "Are there any frustrations or blockers you're currently tolerating?"
How can we support your growth?	"Do you feel like you're growing here?" "What skills or projects would you like to take on next?" "Are there development opportunities you feel you're missing out on?" "Is your current role aligned with your long-term career goals?"
What can we improve?	"What do you wish was different about your day-to-day experience?" "What would make your job easier or more enjoyable?" "Are there processes or tools you find frustrating or outdated?" "What's one thing we could do to make your work life better this month?"

*Manager tip: Use open-ended prompts, and allow space for silence – it encourages honest answers. A good follow-up is: "Tell me more about that..." "What do you look forward to each day at work?"*

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## 5. What to do after the interview

### Checklist:

- Thank the employee for their honesty and time
- Document key takeaways and themes
- Identify quick wins or immediate actions you can take
- Share themes (not names) with HR to look for patterns
- Follow up within 2–4 weeks with updates or progress

### Example follow-up:

*"You mentioned wanting more ownership in projects. I've spoken with [Team Lead], and we'll loop you into the next campaign planning sprint."*

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## 6. Using stay interview insights to drive change

### At the individual level:

- Manager adjusts communication, growth paths, workload, or expectations

### At the team level:

- HR aggregates themes to spot cultural, process, or workload patterns

### At the org level:

- Feed results into broader retention, engagement, and wellbeing strategies

**Example:**

If 40% of employees say they lack development opportunities, you might:

- Expand internal mobility programs
  - Launch skill-building workshops
  - Encourage more job shadowing and mentorship
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**7. Stay interview template (optional use)**

Section	Notes or examples
What keeps you here?	Autonomy, recognition, learning
What could make you leave?	Lack of career path, unclear expectations
What can we improve?	More feedback, clearer priorities
Growth goals	Lead a project, learn new skill
Actions we'll take	Schedule mentorship, invite to strategy session