

# Stay Interview Guide

Richard P. Finnegan, an expert on stay interviews, defines a stay interview as “a structured discussion a supervisor conducts with an individual team member to learn specific actions the supervisor can take to strengthen the team member’s engagement and retention with the organization.”

## Stay Interviews Are

- One-on-one conversations
- Designed to learn what motivates the team member to stay engaged
- About asking questions and listening
- Proactive and scheduled
- Facilitated typically by supervisors
- Structured & focused, ideally 20-30 minutes in length

## Stay Interviews Are Not

- Conversations at a team meeting
- Exit Interviews that focus on team member motivations for leaving an organization
- About training, coaching, or job performance
- Led by Human Resources
- Long rant session

## Why do Stay Interviews

Stay Interviews help supervisors understand why team members stay and what might cause them to leave. It can help supervisors develop more productive one-on-one relationships with their team members.

### Helps Team Members Understand...

- Recognize and appreciate their contributions and loyalty
- The organization cares about more than just their performance
- The organization values them enough to be open to making changes that would increase their satisfaction

### They Help Supervisors Discover...

- Warning signs that indicate someone needs more support or direction
- Motivations for and aspirations of their relationship with the organization
- Ways to keep them engaged and committed to the organization
- Low and no-cost changes that can reaffirm their commitment & engagement

## Key Reminders for a Healthy & Productive Conversation

- Bring an open mind that focuses more on the “Why not?” versus the “That could never be done here,” as this will lead to greater success in improving engagement and retention.
- Use the collectivism cultural approach and emphasize the team accomplishments and “we” over “I” or “they.”
- Expect reasonable change and know that organizational culture, environment, and flexibility are often why people leave.
- Expect to have additional conversations about policies and procedures.

## How to Conduct Stay Interviews

Stay Interviews are not to be part of a performance review. You can do a very formal process or one that is more casual.



# Stay Interview Guide for Supervisors

## Approaches to Stay Interviews

- **Casual Conversation:** You may ask a couple of questions of your team members in a casual but sort of private environment while they are doing their work, in the break room, or at lunch/coffee. Tell them why you are asking the questions and acknowledge how you will follow up on anything you may need to.
- **Traditional Interview:** As the supervisor, you have a list of questions that help guide the conversation. Tell them why you are asking the questions and acknowledge how you will follow up on anything you may need to.
- **Stay Survey/Questionnaire & Interview:** Team members receive a Stay Interview Survey/Questionnaire and are given a couple of weeks to complete it. Supervisors receive a copy of the responses and schedule a time in the next couple of weeks to connect for 30 minutes. During this meeting, an informal conversation occurs reviewing the questions and discussing the responses.

## Preparing to Have Stay Interviews

Preparing for the questions you may encounter during the stay interview is paramount. You want to be able to direct people to the resources they have available to them and begin the process of putting yourself in their shoes. Remember that this is an exercise in listening and represents opportunities for improvement. After you've held the interviews, you can circle back with resources and share plans to address some of the issues/opportunities they shared.

Ideally stay interviews are used to make positive change to retain your team members. If these positive changes are a priority and enacted. Stay interviews are recommended annually. The Stay Interview process should be voluntary.

To close the Stay Interview, the supervisor should summarize the key reasons the team member gave for staying or potentially leaving. If commitments for change can be made during the interview you can include them in the summary, but most often it is done in a follow-up email or conversation.

## Stay Interview Implementation Best Practices

The most effective stay interviews are done by supervisors one-on-one with their team members. Here are some additional best practices to assist in the implementation of stay interviews:

- **Listening is 80%:** The remaining 20% is for asking questions, probing for more information, and clarifying points made.
- **Set Expectations:** Share why you are investing time in the conversation and the positive intent to institute change. Be clear and concise.
- **Consider the Setting:** Find a comfortable spot that isn't too public. Avoid the power dynamic of a desk.
- **Take Detailed Notes:** Track key points and emotional trigger points that make crafting a solution/resolution easier.
- **Select Team Members is Acceptable:** You're not obligated to speak to all team members. Prioritize those who have been with the organization the longest or are the riskiest to lose.
- **Ask Open-Ended Questions:** Enable a more dynamic conversation and explore what is and isn't working by asking open-ended questions and utilizing probing questions as needed.
- **Opening Script:** Provide a consistent opening that is natural, clear, and sets the tone for the conversation. Do not promise anything that you can't deliver.

# Stay Interview Guide for Supervisors

## Sample Stay Interview

### Opening

- I would like to talk with you about the reasons you are staying with us so I can better understand what I might be able to do to make this an even better opportunity for you.
- I would like to visit with you to find out how your role is going so I can do my best to support you, particularly with issues within my control.

### Questions

- What kind of feedback about your contributions or recognition would you like that you aren't receiving currently?
  - What type of feedback would you like to receive about your contributions that you are not receiving from me now? From co-workers/peers?
- What opportunities for self-improvement would you like to have that go beyond your current role with us?
- What kinds of flexibility would be helpful to you in balancing your work with us and life?
  - Tell me what I could do to help make this better.
- What talents, interests, or skills do you have that we haven't made the most of?
- What are you most proud of as you reflect on your time with us?
  - What contribution to the agency is your most memorable?
  - What made this so special for you?
- If you could change one thing about the agency or your role, what would it be?
  - How would this change improve your satisfaction in your role?
- What do you look forward to when you come here?
  - Give me an example; tell me more about...
- What do you enjoy most and least about working with us?
  - What do you value most about working with us?
  - Are there actions that we can take to further challenge or support you?
- What keeps you working with us?
  - Tell me more about why that is so important to you.
  - What is most meaningful to you?
- What would make your work more satisfying?
  - *If possible*, how could we structure your role to ensure this happens?
- What do you want to be doing that you aren't currently doing?
  - What would you like to learn this year? How might you learn it?
  - How do you want to grow with us in the next year?
- What can we do to support you and your career goals?
  - What could I be doing to fully use your talents and skills?
- What makes you feel valued?
- What motivates you?
  - Do you feel like you and the work you are doing makes a difference? Tell me how.
- When was the last time you thought about leaving your role, and what prompted it?
  - Tell me more about how that happened.
- Can you help me understand what triggers or negative factors might cause you to consider leaving?
- What would need to change for you to be excited about staying with the agency for the next six, twelve, or eighteen months?
  - How would this impact your job satisfaction?
  - What is the most meaningful action I could take to address this issue?

# Stay Interview Guide for Supervisors

- What can I/your supervisor do more of or less of to enhance your experience?
  - Do I say and do things to help you do your job better?
  - What are three ways I can be a better supervisor for you
- Is there anything else you want to share or discuss?
  - Do you have suggestions on how we can improve as an organization?\
  - What actions can we take to further support you in your role?

## Closing

To close the stay interview, summarize the key reasons the team member gave for saying or potentially leaving the agency, and work with the team member to determine the best way to a follow-up on and implement items discussed. Convey your appreciation for them sharing their thoughts.

## Sources:

- [How to Conduct Stay Interviews: Core Features and Advantages by Richard P. Finnegan posted on SHRM](#)
- [How to Conduct Stay Interviews: Preparation by Richard P. Finnegan posted on SHRM](#)
- [6 Stay Interview Questions that Top Employers Ask by Insperity Staff posted on Insperity.com](#)
- [Stay Interviews: 20 Possible Questions You Should Consider Asking by Dr. John Sullivan posted on TLNT.com](#)