

Exit Interviews: Are They Valuable?

*What You Can Learn
From Them*

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Great effort is put into the selection of a new employee.

You prepare by analyzing the characteristics and type of person you want in the job, evaluating the job to determine if task realignment is necessary, writing a new job description, determining the salary, writing a descriptive recruiting ad, interviewing the candidates and making a selection. All of this is in anticipation that the person will perform as they said they would or be as capable as they appeared to be in the interview. What happens when the person proves to be incompetent, is not willing to learn new things, does not fit with the work ethic of the business, is found to be untrustworthy, is not a team player or any number of other characteristics that either irritates the boss or upsets staff morale to the point that it becomes necessary to fire the person?

Or, what if an employee gives their notice of termination, or perhaps a long-time valued employee chooses to leave employment for any of a variety of reasons. The reason given may be for higher salary, a shorter drive to work, or to be home more with the children, but those may not be the real reasons. A few well-thought out questions may reveal the real reason for leaving.

Although your time is precious, valuable information can be obtained from taking the time to do an exit interview. There are several benefits: they help maintain good relations with the person leaving; they assure remaining staff of the employer's desire to maintain efficient, friendly staff; as well as obtain feedback that can help improve the quality of the practice/business.

It would be easy to avoid exit interviews because of the fear they may be confrontational, especially if the employee is leaving under negative terms. It is not easy to hear comments and discuss circumstances surrounding an employee's departure. However, doing so can help prevent costly turnover among the other staff. It can give you insight into your hiring process. It can also be enlightening as to some aspects of the practice/business that could be improved or at least have the potential for discontent.

You may learn that the real reason for leaving is not for a shorter ride to work but because of other issues, such as workloads, schedules, personality problems, underutilized talents, lack of recognition of accomplishments and/or a job well done, lack of personal satisfaction, etc. Through the exit interview, valuable insights can be obtained into working conditions, staff morale, methods of handling patients/clients and other administrative and operational deficiencies that need attention so as to improve overall office efficiency and productivity.

So, bite the bullet and have the exit interview. But how, you ask?

Here are some tips and questions that can be asked during an exit interview:

- Conduct the interview in a non-threatening atmosphere which will encourage openness. The departing employee may be very frank because he/she feels that they have nothing to lose. They will "tell it like it is."
- Develop a set of questions that may help direct the interview in a positive direction. Some of these questions may be:



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- What did you like the most about your job here?
 - What did you like the least?
 - Were you comfortable with the office working conditions? Supervision? Staff morale? Other staff?
 - What is your attitude toward features of your job here such as, duties, salary, hours worked, benefits, supervision, office policies, division of labor, patient/client relations, etc.
 - What is the real reason for leaving your position?
 - Assuming they have another job, ask: are there aspects of your new employment that you feel were lacking in your job here?
 - Do you have suggestions to offer that can make for a better working atmosphere?
 - Would you recommend this office to a friend as a good place to work?
- Offer to write a letter of recommendation if needed and requested.
 - It may be appropriate to give some show of appreciation for a job well done, especially if a valued employee is leaving or retiring.
 - If requested, offer to make a referral to a colleague.

Not all of these questions will be appropriate in every case of a departing employee. The circumstances surrounding their leaving will prompt which to ask. The answers will give some inkling as to how the office is viewed from an employee's point of view.

Staff turnover is expensive in financial and emotional terms. Use the opportunity it provides to fill a position with a person who better fits the job or take the insights obtained during the exit interview to improve and/or change some of the aspects of the practice/business. A wise leader lessens the overall critical remarks and turns them into positive, practice/business building opportunities.

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