



# Before You Go... The Exit Interview

By David Lewis, OperationsInc

**The employee peers in and asks if they can talk to you. They close the door, and then they say it — I am leaving; I resign; I quit.**

This is one of the low points a manager in any business has to face. When the dust settles we move into response mode as we try and plan for a future without that employee. Unfortunately, what is frequently missed in the middle of this moment is the opportunity that an Exit Interview could bring if executed properly.

An Exit Interview consists of a meeting with the resigning party with the purpose of learning why they are leaving and essentially targeted at identifying the issues in your workplace. They usually result in candid discussions that possess some of the most valuable information a business could hope to secure. While some of what you will hear in the interview are things you already know or don't want to know, any information about the health of your organization is of some value.

Exit Interviews should be conducted by the person who owns the Human Resources function or a professionally skilled third party who is retained only to perform these and report back on the results. The more objective-looking the person the better, as this perception will result in richer feedback from the exiting employee. Usually these occur in the office during the last few days of employment, although it is not unusual to reach out after the person has left. This is not recommended, however, as you tend to have a tougher time engaging them on their own time versus while they are still on your payroll.

The line of questioning has been boiled down by some to a form, a checklist or even a set of standard questions. While this will certainly yield some useful information, a more creative approach can be more effective — an approach that is tied to one mission: learning, from this person's vantage point, the issues with your firm that resulted in their resignation. Ask them what could have changed six months or a year ago that could have resulted in them staying with your company. Another possibility is to mix in a fantasy scenario that puts them in the role of CEO for the last year where they brief you on what they have changed about the firm during their tenure. This style of questioning yields more honest and creative responses.

You don't have to dispense with other questions such as asking about supervisors, co-workers, company communication, and any other issues that may be relevant. The more creative and spontaneous you are, the better the result. You should ask some direct questions, including asking their opinion on how others view the firm and if the issues that drove them to resign will also drive others out in the near term. Seek out information and insight on any liability issues including, but not limited to, any harassment committed by management or other employees, labor violations, etc.

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Opinions on leadership style are helpful to solicit, and asking about their new job is also of great value. Lastly, always give the individual a chance to throw in anything you have not asked about by asking if there is anything else they wish to share. All of the information gathered should be duly noted and recorded.

Now that you have this information you need to put it to good use. Assemble what you obtained from the Exit Interview into a report to be reviewed with senior management. If you average five

or more resignations per month you can create reporting that removes names and sources and talks in terms of feedback and trends collectively. This allows for less of a chance that management will dismiss collected data due to what could be viewed as a questionable or disgruntled source — e.g. Bob was a poor employee so his opinion does not matter. When you have a smaller population you cannot easily get around this issue. This is feedback that needs to be reviewed, discussed and, in many cases, acted upon.

Many say that the Exit Interview results give them information they already know, and more importantly, highlight areas that are out of our control: We pay too little; we work our people too hard; we don't provide enough training. The reality is that there will be some feedback

that you cannot act on, but mixed in will be data that can spark change, reinforce perceptions or knock them down. Regardless of what you learn, it will all carry value. Making Exit Interviews a part of your overall HR processes will make a difference, almost certainly for the better.

*David Lewis is a human resources professional and President/CEO of OperationsInc, a Stamford, CT based human resources outsourcing and consulting firm. His firm provides HR support to over 400 area clients, including but not limited to support in the area of Exit Interview Outsourcing. You can find more information at [www.OperationsInc.com](http://www.OperationsInc.com).*

**David is also presenting a workshop though CT Nonprofits' Center for Professional Development. "Social Media and Your Employees: How the Use of Social Media by Your Employees Can Impact Your Business"** will be held on Friday, April 23 from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the James Blackstone Memorial Library in Branford. This highly informational workshop will cover topics such as: Using social media to screen new hires; the new role for confidentiality/ non-disclosure agreements; policy statements on social media use; and tracking activity and reacting to unfavorable postings. For more details and to register, visit [www.ctnonprofits.org/education/offerings](http://www.ctnonprofits.org/education/offerings).

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