



## WORDS ON WISE MANAGEMENT

### Exit interviews: Better late than never

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Most of us are aware of the high cost of replacing team members when they decide to leave our organization. When an employee leaves, many organizations have a “going away” party or some sort of celebration. What exactly are we celebrating? Does a party mean we are glad to see the employee go? Perhaps it depends on the person’s contributions and relationships within the organization. Wouldn’t it make more sense to occasionally have a “glad you’re still here” celebration?

When it comes to people leaving, does your organization want to understand the real reasons employees decide to seek employment elsewhere? It isn’t uncommon for companies to perform exit interviews with their departing employees. The issue with exit interviews comes when the organization gathers the information and then does nothing with it.

#### ***Technology boosts effectiveness***

Many HR professionals don’t put exit interviews high on their priority list. The employee already left, and you have way more important things to do, right? Well, not really, if you want to avoid the fate described in the old saying “Those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it.” Although it’s more than 200 years old, that quote from Edmund Burke still rings true in many ways, especially when it comes to an organization’s turnover woes.

That raises the question, if it costs so much to replace people, why do so many companies do such a poor job of tracking the “whys” of people leaving? With today’s technology, exit surveys can, and have, become more effective than ever. In the past, people were often interviewed face-to-face, which, depending on their reason for leaving, could be awkward, to say the least. A soon-to-be-ex-employee is much more likely to express her true feelings about the company via a convenient online survey sent right to her smartphone.

So how do you ensure that you get the most out of your exit interview process? Here are some ideas:

- Put an off-boarding process in place to gather all the information you can just before the employee leaves. Once he is gone, it becomes harder to get him to participate in an exit survey.
- Formulate a positive message about the exit interview, and share it with the employee. Let him know you are trying to improve the company by using the survey.
- Ask the right questions. Get to the point, and be direct. The truth may hurt, but as an organization, you need to know if you want to get better.
- Think quality over quantity. Recently, I reviewed an exit interview from a company that would take a minimum of 15 minutes to complete. If you’re a slow-to-medium reader, it would take more like 30 minutes to complete. If a survey is too long, people become bored and have a tendency not to think about their answers.
- Provide space for comments. You want to encourage departing employees to share their ideas, not the ideas you steer them to with multiple-choice answers.

#### ***Do something with the data***

The last and most important step in the exit interview process is what you do with the information you receive. If your organization is large, it isn’t uncommon to lose several people a month, so you should have lots of information to work with. Compile the data, and look for common themes. Sometimes themes can be real, while other times they may just be perceptions (or misperceptions) that arise out of things like poor communication, for example. Either way, a well-designed exit interview gives you direction with regard to the areas you need to address.



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