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Wait, Don't Go! - The "Stay Interview" by Kathi Guiney SPHR, GPHR, President **YES!** Your Human Resources Solution.

While most companies focus on the exit interview, a few leading edge enterprises are putting their time into the "stay interview."

And with good reason.

Employees on their last day are not the best resources. They're busy tying up loose ends and deleting personal photos from their hard drives. They rarely tell the brutal truth, not wanting to burn references bridges. For them, "I am leaving for a better opportunity" really means, "I'm outta here."

Through an exit interview, short-timers can still help you gather data on workplace conditions and employee satisfaction, and fine-tune the right match for their positions—but what if you were able to prevent these key employees from looking elsewhere in the first place? The stay interview may fill that need.

So what is a stay interview? In a stay interview, managers learn the unique reasons why their direct reports continue to choose the company as their employer. Stay interviews also help managers create career plans to enhance the likelihood of retaining their employees. Employees benefit by hearing directly from their supervisor that they are a valued member of the team. This results in both manager and employee accepting responsibility to ensure the "staying" occurs.

How should managers structure the stay interview? First if this is a new program for your company; announce and market it internally. Indicate that stay interviews should be held at least once a year, separately from the annual performance review discussion. Give employees insight into the purpose of the meetings and types of questions that will be asked. The more prepared they are, the better the conversation.

What do you ask in a stay interview? The questions should focus on gathering information to answer, "Why do you choose to work here?" Some examples: "On your way to work this morning, what were you looking forward to doing in your job?" and, "Is there something you would like to be learning here that you are not?"

As we have read in many articles about retention, employees more often leave managers, not companies. But the opposite is also true and employees stay due to managers! How powerful a retention tool would it be to know the answer to, "What can I do to enhance your work experience?" or, "Is there something I should definitely continue (or discontinue) to do as it relates to your day-to-day responsibilities?"

A very important aspect of any stay interview is to understand the employees' career aspirations. Guessing or assuming you know probably means you are wrong half of the time! So a good closing question is, "Tell me about your career aspirations, and do you currently feel you can achieve those here?" This gives you a chance to offer focused career challenges for each employee. In some cases, the answer will help you realize that an employee may need to move on to other opportunities, which will allow you to establish a succession plan.

Hiring and retaining employees is an investment of company financial resources and time. Just like any investment, paying attention to it and making sure the investment grows in value is a successful outcome. A stay interview program is a key tool to that success equation—or to put a twist on a tried-and-true phrase: "Shut the barn door **before** the horses leave!"