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Toolkits and Cultural Agility for Stay interviews

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When it comes to retaining highly valued employees, particularly from populations different from a dominant cultural group, organizations often find during an exit interview that addressing a relatively little concern would have gone a long way in retaining that person. One way to uncover such concerns is a stay interview – a proactive way to gather information and identify reasons why someone might leave, in other words, to uncover potential *exit triggers*. Stay interviews can also be used to recognize elements, known as *engagement influencers*, which increase an employee's connection with their jobs, co-workers, and the organization. Lastly, stay interviews can even help employers discover if there is anything that can be done to facilitate an employee's happiness, which can impact *stay factors*. Usually requiring a minimal investment of time and energy, stay interviews can be a great way to increase retention and can be especially useful for retention of employees representing valuable organizational diversity.

As a Diversity Best Practices Solutions@ partner, LCW was recently approached by an organization seeking to increase retention rates of women of color at certain levels of management. This Fortune 100 organization's exit interview data identifies the most common reasons people in this specific demographic decide to leave, which they are doing at disproportionately higher rates than average. The organization's primary interest was in developing a stay interview toolkit for people managers because they realized some managers were already conducting interviews without a coordinated effort. LCW recommended to the organization a strategy for consideration and shares here some of those recommendations.

Stay Interview Basics

While stay interviews can help build trust between a manager and an employee, they can also function as a recognition tool, and are most commonly used to develop structured actions, known as stay plans, that can be put into place to help engage and retain an employee.

A stay interview toolkit can set an organizational structure that establishes criteria for selecting who receives an interview, specifies types of questions and behaviors to engage and avoid during interviews, offers guidance for how candidate responses might be interpreted across multiple perspectives, and recommends possible actions to take to increase retention.

A robust toolkit that effectively supports managers and human resource business partners (HRBPs) during the stay interview process will encompass several components. LCW recommends that organizations craft toolkits specific to their organizational circumstances and consider including components that address at least the following:

Preparing for an interview:

- Clearly establish evidence-based, weighted criteria for selecting interview candidates (including warning signals and related considerations).
- Offer support on handling employee resistance including information for interview candidates about what to expect during and after the interview.
- Provide checklists and templates for managers to use when preparing for a specific candidate's interview.

Conducting an interview:

- Delineate the stages of a stay interview, including effective sequencing of questions and the pre- and post-interview process.
- Suggest what managers should say, do, and avoid before, during, and after an interview.
- Provide a list of potential questions, along with related considerations for how managers can interpret and understand candidate answers.

Following up after an interview:

- Provide sample organization-specific responses to employee needs and concerns, such as those that surface during exit interviews, engagement surveys and previously conducted stay interviews.
- Identify the scope of actions that managers can take without approval as well as circumstances requiring upstream approval or guidance from HRBPs.
- Highlight internal and external resources available to assist managers in decision-making processes.
- Establish organizational guidelines for managerial response, action, and check-in timelines.

Implementation Concerns

It does little good to support efforts that uncover an employee's real needs and concerns if the organization is not prepared to recognize and take action on those concerns. And the actions taken must align with the organization's overall approach to diversity, its leadership capacity, talent management strategy, and unique organizational circumstances.

HRBPs can play an integral role in the creation of a stay interview toolkit and ought to be involved in the drafting of potential stay plans. Sometimes the solution is simple and easy, sometimes it is more complex and laborious, and sometimes nothing meaningful can be done. Helping managers successfully navigate the process in order to increase retention and engagement remains the primary goal.

Of course, it is equally important for managers to avoid over-promising, and to get back to employees in a timely manner when desired adjustments cannot be put into place. And the organization must be willing to act in some capacity on the data it receives, or clearly explain why it cannot, similar to the need to respond to engagement data identified in employee surveys.

The Need for Cultural Agility in Managers

Cultural agility, otherwise known as cultural competence, requires managers to navigate through the world views of their direct reports. Managers must also advocate for the point of view of a direct report without judgment, even when the need or concern they are advocating is not fully comprehended. For an interview's resulting stay plan to be effective, managers must take a direct report's experience as real and valid. Across similarities and differences, managers need to be willing to lean into their own discomfort and view circumstances from the employee's perspective – whether across gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, ability, age, culture, or any meaningful difference, employee concerns must be surfaced and acted upon in a culturally competent manner.

Giving cross-cultural feedback can be a difficult challenge and if managers cannot hear an employee's concerns without getting defensive about themselves or the organization, the whole process can backfire. With the provision of effective cultural competence training and development opportunities and resources, it is more likely that managers will be able to recognize factors such as how their own communication style compares to the styles of their direct reports, how direct reports perceive their manager's behavior (regardless of the manager's intent), and how managers can make behavioral adjustments that validate and engage the world views of their direct reports. And with a properly designed and implemented interview toolkit, it is more likely that organizations will be successful at retaining and engaging all employees, regardless of similarities or differences in background, experience or culture.

As with any organizational concern, if the employer does not set a structure, people will do whatever they perceive is best, and that can lead to difficult, and damaging, employee relations. The need for proactively developing cultural competence on a routine, on-going basis cannot be overstated.

Stay interviews are just one tool to deploy during an organization's D&I journey and implementation will be less successful if stay interviews exist in isolation. A good stay interview strategy from a D&I perspective includes connecting the process to leadership capacity and development, retention rates of diverse employees, and organization-wide structure regarding related processes and action plans. Cultural competence development should be provided for anyone conducting stay interviews, and a well-executed toolkit can go a long way in supporting interviewers as they create meaningful engagement and retention stay plans.

Jeffrey Cookson, GPHR, SPHR, Manager of Learning & Development, LCW, specializes in the development of cultural competence in both domestic and international diversity and has consulted in the D&I space for 20 years. Click [here](#) [1] for more information on how LCW can help your organization develop cultural competence in HR practices.

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