

TITLE: Exit Interviews - The Door Swings Both Ways

Louise S. Dunn
Snowgoose Veterinary Management Consulting
1955 Indian Wells Trails
Pfafftown, NC 27404
336-945-0208
snogoose@infionline.net

DON'T LET THE DOOR HIT YOU

When an employee leaves your business do you say to yourself, "Don't let the door hit you on the way out!" Many times, when an employee leaves, this is the feeling a manager has. It may be due to a failure of them to respond to all the hours of coaching and trying to fix their short-comings resulting in your firing them; or it may be due to all the time you put in to develop a top-notch team member and now they are taking all that training and using it to benefit the competitor down the road. Whatever the reason, the desire to just move on sometimes prevents a manager from conducting a very important interview, almost as important as the hiring interviewing, that interview is the exit interview.

HOW TO CONDUCT THE INTERVIEW

Exit interviews are usually conducted with voluntary terminations such as resignations and retirements; and certain involuntary terminations such as firing an employee for poor performance or for workforce reductions. The exit interview procedure is as follows:

- Prepare all documentations prior to the interview
- Use an exit form during the interview Conduct the interview with the employee
- Summarize the interview in a discussion with owners and pertinent supervisors

Preparing The Documentation

Since you need to prepare documentation one should be aware that on-the-spot termination should not occur unless there is some grave, unlawful act occurring. The consequences of improper handling of a termination is like a ripple in a pond, from affecting team morale to risking litigation - so make the effort to review events and documentations leading up to the exit.

Additionally, review the checklist attached to this article regarding items to discuss (final pay, benefits, rehire, letter of reference), and property to collect from the employee (keys, uniforms, membership dues, equipment). See Handout #1 Exit Interview Checklist.

The Exit Interview Form

A Google search will give you numerous articles and samples of exit interview questions. The goal for your questioning is to get to the root cause of why the employee is leaving. Even if the employee is being terminated, asking some hard questions about the practice and permitting the employee to vent can still offer pertinent information for practice improvement.

Review the form attached to this article for sample questions. One caveat, this is about your business so you will need to adjust some of the questions to the situation and to your unique business so use the sample form as a starting point. See Handout #2 Exit Interview Questions.

The Actual Interview

When it comes time to sit down for a face-to-face discussion, follow these pointers (Dawkins) to ensure a comfortable environment for both you and the exiting employee:

- Conduct the interview in a private office.
- Prevent telephone, intercom, and cell phone or employee interruptions.
- Allow enough time so as not to be hurried.
- Arrange seating in a non-confrontational manner (avoid sitting across a table from one another and opt for circular or side-by-side seating).
- Ideally, a neutral third party should conduct the interview if possible - this would be someone other than the exiting employee's direct supervisor.

- Schedule the interview during the final week of employment (any earlier and there may be a fear that discussions will be leaked and gossiping or harassment may occur).
- Take notes for a written record of the exit interview and keep the conversation comfortable so as to encourage sharing ideas and criticisms (the interviewer can't become defensive or critical).

Your goal for conducting the interview is to gain information that can help improve the business. End the interview by thanking them for their honesty and their service.

The Summary

Your exit interview procedure is doomed to fail if you are only going through the motions to appear "interested" or "legal". To make an exit interview valuable, consider these recommendations from The Retention Institute:

- Find out why the person is leaving; ask questions that get to the root of the issue.
- Tell them you want to hear their opinions and pass along the information to make the practice better.
- Prepare yourself as a trained interviewer (like you do for hiring interviews).
- Ask the employee what steps they took to resolve their issues and listen for obstructions or suggest actions they could have taken (so they might accept some responsibility).

After conducting a thorough interview, document information discussed and consider an "official" letter or documents to be signed and copied for the departing employee and for their personnel file (See handout #3). Also, pass along the results to the proper people. It will not benefit anyone if you merely type up the interview and file it away. Spend some time digesting the responses and involving the appropriate people to discuss the responses.

WHAT YOUR PRACTICE CAN GAIN FROM THE INTERVIEW

If there are noted patterns of performance issues with the supervisor then discuss the issues and recommendations with the supervisor. Involve the practice owners in reviewing the information, if there are patterns in exiting employees then the owners must get involved in discussions regarding the weaknesses present in the business and ways to remedy those weaknesses in order to retain their quality employees and hire more high-quality team members.

Given the high cost of turnover, it would behoove the practice to review the exit interview information and take action where needed.

Exit interviews should be viewed as a proactive measure to address complaints, improve the practice and prevent litigation. In other words, when you think those words about the door hitting someone, think about the door swinging back and hitting you for failing to conduct the exit interview.

References

Dawkins, J. How To Conduct An Exit Interview. Available on-line at: <http://www.exitinterviews.com.au/How-To-Conduct-An-Exit-Interview.htm>

Finnegan, D. (2010, May). Last Best chance: Exit Interviews That Work. Retention Institute and SHRM.

Society For Human Resource Management. Templates and Tools.

http://www.shrm.org/templatestools/samples/hrforms/articles/pages/1cms_015225.aspx

http://www.shrm.org/TemplateTools/Samples/HRForms/Articles/Pages/1CMS_002024.aspx

http://www.shrm.org/templatestools/samples/hrforms/articles/pages/1cms_002021.aspx

http://www.shrm.org/TemplateTools/Samples/HRForms/Articles/Pages/CMS_002023.aspx