



# University of Missouri System

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## Stay Interviews: 5 Questions to Help You Retain Your Employees

One of our most important resources is the wealth of knowledge, experience, and talent our employees bring to work each day. Stay interviews can be a powerful tool to help our organization retain and support employees by promoting:

- Engagement and authentic connection
- Proactive, intentional, forward thinking
- Solutions based on individual employee's needs

The three most important skills of leading a stay interview are:



### Listening

Enter the meeting with a commitment to listen and digest what you've heard. Strive to listen 80% of the time vs. talking 80% of the time. Repeat back what you hear.



### Probing

Probe to learn more and to show you care with phrases such as "Tell me more," "Give me an example," and "How important is this to you?"



### Taking Notes

Notes should capture key points, emotional words, and important quotes. You'll eventually use these notes to formulate a solution.

**Get started** by emphasizing that the focus will be on things you and they can directly influence (although you will listen to all concerns).

*"I'd like to focus on things that I can help you with each day to be engaged in your work. My hope is that you want to stay with the university for a long time."*



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1

*What things do you look forward to each day?*

This question brings employees into the here and now. It emphasizes:

- What employees like about their current job.
- How they see themselves and their role.

2

*What are you learning here?*

- Invite employees to share desires regarding development and careers; focus on skills.
- Some are ambitious to advance, some curious to learn more, others are satisfied where they are.

3

*Why do you stay here?*

- While appearing simple at first, asking why employees want to stay with our organization opens major doors for discovery.
- Some employees have never pondered their answer; keep probing.

4

*When was the last time you thought about leaving our team? What prompted it?*

- Everyone thinks about leaving sometimes, so a directly worded question brings a much-needed conversation into the light.
- When an employee last thought about leaving tells us the urgency, and what prompted it tells us why.

5

*What can I do to make your experience at work better?*

- While this question sends out a net for all remaining topics, it ultimately can provide meaningful feedback.
- Avoiding defensiveness is crucial. Word spreads quickly if a leader cannot take feedback, and remaining stay interviews become short and fruitless.



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Other probing questions and phrases to consider for deeper discussion:

- *What do you like about your job?*
- *Who do you look forward to working with the most?*
- *What do you look forward to doing the most?*
- *Which other jobs here look attractive to you?*
  - *What skills do you think are required for those jobs?*
  - *What skills would you have to build to attain those jobs?*
- *Can you give me an example?*
- *Take your time, because I really want to know.*
- *Is that the only reason you stay or are there others?*
- *If you narrowed your concerns about work to just one, what would it be?*
- *What's the single best thing I can do to make that better for you?*
- *How important is this issue to you now on a 1–10 scale?*

One important phrase to have in your back pocket during the conversation:

*"Tell me more..."*

- *...about why that is so important.*
- *...about how that happened.*
- *...about how that impacts your work.*

Interested in learning more?



[The Power of Stay Interviews for Engagement and Retention](#), Richard P. Finnegan



[The Stay Interview: A Manager's Guide to Keeping the Best and Brightest](#), Richard P. Finnegan



[Expert Insights on Employee Retention](#), various