

Exit Interview Procedures

Management Liability/Employment Practices Risk Management

Employment termination is a reality for every organization. Regardless of who is terminating the employment relationship, the employee or the organization, it is always necessary to conduct an exit interview. Exit interviews provide a final opportunity to gather insights about how employees perceived their working experience with an organization. Exit interviews also provide an organization another opportunity to learn of any workplace wrongdoing that may have occurred during an employee's tenure.

A primary objective of an exit interview is to learn of alleged workplace wrongdoing, such as harassment or discrimination, allowing for a prompt and thorough investigation. Simply asking questions may be enough to encourage an employee to come forward with an allegation, rather than hold on to an allegation until a later date. By conducting an exit interview, the organization will also strengthen its position that it took every reasonable measure to learn of and rectify workplace wrongdoing.

This bulletin offers guidelines and sample exit interview questions to enhance your organization's personnel practices. The goal is to strengthen personnel relations, improve working conditions, and reduce exposure to litigation.

Preparing For Exit Interviews

Conduct exit interviews with departing employees, whether their separation is voluntary or involuntary. It is recommended that two persons facilitate the oral exit interview with the departing employee, which helps clarify what is said during the meeting.

Consider the following suggestions when planning the exit interview.

- Interviews can be conducted orally (face to face or over the telephone) or in writing. Oral interviews are preferable because personal interaction is important for the sensitive nature of severing the working relationship. However, employees may be asked to complete a written exit interview form or questionnaire if an oral interview cannot be scheduled or it would be more appropriate or comfortable for the individual to answer in written format, on his or her own time schedule.
- Carefully select the interviewers. Choose neutral persons the departing employee trusts and can keep issues confidential.
- Review the departing individual's personnel file and visit with appropriate supervisors for a thorough understanding of the known circumstances that lead to the separation of the working relationship.
- If applicable, be prepared to reiterate the organization's legitimate reasons for the dismissal.
- Schedule the exit interview session as close as possible to the employee's departure from the organization. The meeting may be planned as the employee's last official business with the organization.

- Assure the departing employee understands that comments made during the exit interview will remain as confidential as possible, while still allowing for a prompt and thorough investigation should allegations of workplace wrongdoing arise.
- Make assurances the organization does not tolerate retaliation against anyone for making a complaint of workplace wrongdoing or for participating in an investigation.
- Listen to the departing employee's comments and diligently document. Do not give personal opinions, but instead remain objective.
- Do not argue with a departing employee.
- Expect the unexpected. Do not be surprised if the departing employee makes new allegations.
- Never conduct an exit interview alone, particularly if the departing employee has ever demonstrated irrational or violent propensities. Before the meeting, review the organization's workplace violence and safety policies and procedures.
- Be prepared to explain the organization's policy on providing references.

Sample Exit Interview Questions

Exit interviews represent a prime opportunity to gain candid information on employment or working conditions within the organization. Not only can an organization gain important feedback on its strengths and weaknesses (as perceived by the individual), but exit interviews may also provide an opportunity for a departing employee to bring forward any allegations (i.e., discrimination or harassment) should they exist. This also provides an opportunity to cover continuation of health insurance or other benefits for which the former employee may be eligible.

Consider the following exit interview questions.

1. Specifically, why are you leaving ABC organization (if termination is voluntary)?
2. Do you believe you were treated fairly while with the organization?
3. Did you feel valued as an employee?
4. What aspects of your job were most satisfying?
5. What did you like most about your job and/or association with ABC organization?
6. What did you like least about your job and/or association with the organization?
7. Do you have any suggestions for improving work conditions, productivity, or morale?
8. Do you have any recommendations for improving the organization's training and personnel development programs?
9. Please comment on your working relationship with your supervisor.
10. Was your supervisor supportive and communicative with you?
11. Did your supervisor seek your input on issues affecting your work?
12. How frequently did you have discussions with your supervisor(s) about your career goals?
13. How would you evaluate the performance of your supervisor(s)?

14. How would you describe employee/volunteer morale within the organization? What factors influence your answer?
15. Please comment on the employee benefit plans. Did the benefits meet your needs sufficiently? Are there other benefits that could have been offered?
16. Were you ever denied benefits that you thought you were entitled to receive?
17. Do you know of any unreported workplace related accidents, injuries, or illnesses involving yourself or others?
18. Do you presently suffer from an injury that is work-related?
19. During your employment, did you understand the organization's policies and reporting procedures/grievance procedures?
20. Did you observe or were you personally subjected to work-related harassment during your employment with the organization?
21. During your employment with ABC organization, did you ever think that you were discriminated or retaliated against because of your race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, religion, age, national origin, veteran status, disability, or for filing a workers' compensation or disability claim? If so, please explain in detail these circumstances.
22. Any additional comments?

How Should You Utilize Information Obtained From Exit Interviews?

All information brought forward by departing employees in exit interviews should be retained, analyzed, and if necessary, thoroughly investigated.

- Assess any trends such as high turnover or problems with specific coworkers or supervisors.
- Utilize information gathered in exit interviews to improve working conditions, productivity, and morale. Share information with those in the organization that can implement change for the better of the organization and its employees.
- Follow up immediately on any allegations of workplace risk or wrongdoing. Do not assume the departing employee made false allegations because he or she was "walking out the door, had nothing to lose, or is simply a vengeful person." Instead, utilize the organization's internal investigation procedures to discover whether the accusations were valid, and prevent future incidents of workplace wrongdoing.