



practice management
and marketing news



LCP Dental Team Coaching (formerly Julie Weir & Associates) is recognized as the premier consulting firm specializing in pediatric dentistry since 1996.

Stay Interview: The One Meeting That Could Save Your Practice

The reality all business leaders face post-pandemic is that 20-30 percent of their workforce is considering jumping ship, and the rest of the team is rarely, if ever, contributing their full effort towards the practice's success. Practice leaders are fighting to attract great employees to the front door while retaining the current employees from walking out the back door. Practice leaders must prioritize keeping good employees even more than finding new employees. One connection meeting between the practice leader and the current employees could massively increase employee loyalty, engagement, and retention.

When an employee is hired, there is an initial connection point in the form of an entry interview. Before they leave or after they are fired, there is usually a final connection point in the form of an exit interview. The connection points practice leaders establish in the middle of these entry and exit interviews will most likely determine the longevity and engagement of that employee at the practice. Some employee engagement experts call these connection points "stay interviews."

A stay interview is conducted with employees who are still with the company to understand their level of engagement and satisfaction and uncover any potential issues that may impact their decision to stay long-term. Conducted as an informal one-on-one meeting, the practice leader will ask several open-ended questions and listen intently to the employee's response. The purpose of a stay interview is to build rapport and to have an honest dialogue with the employee.

WHAT A STAY INTERVIEW IS NOT:

- A stay interview is not a performance review and should not be done as part of a performance review.
- A stay interview is also not formal and should not be accompanied by handouts with checkboxes and written questions.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A SUCCESSFUL STAY INTERVIEW:

- This connection time should not be a surprise to the employee. If regular temperature checks or positive check-ins with employees are a new activity for the practice, then share with them that a leader will be scheduling some time with each employee to connect, hear what is going well, and learn what support they need.
- Give the stay interview a meaningful name. Instead of calling the meeting a "Stay Interview," call them something that evokes positive emotions, not one that invokes fear and dread. Some practices use names like, "coffee connection chat" or "rock star employee check-in."
- Schedule the stay interview in advance. Employees will appreciate advanced notice to prepare their thoughts. Unless the meeting is added to the calendar, it will likely never take place.
- Establish a comfortable atmosphere where the employee feels at ease and encourage them to express their thoughts and concerns freely. Conduct the interview in a private or neutral environment and avoid interruptions.

Leaders often avoid creating opportunities to hear about more problems or requests for pay increases. This can be addressed when informing the team about their upcoming connection meetings. This will be the opportunity to lay ground rules. Set the expectations that each session is an opportunity to connect about the employee's role and ways the leadership team can support them in being as successful and happy as possible at the practice. Finances and compensation will be addressed during yearly performance reviews or at a designated time.

Sharing feedback with a leader is often interpersonally risky for employees. A leader who believes that something valuable will be learned by this interaction will create a more productive connection.

Prepare several open-ended questions to ask the employee. Avoid using phones and computers for notetaking; these devices can distance the leader from the employee and cause a distraction. Having a cell phone present, even if face down, negatively impacts relationships and reduces the connection between people.

EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS:

1. What do you like about your job, and why?
2. What are you learning currently, and what do you want to learn?
3. Why do you stay at this practice?
4. Do you feel valued and supported by your teammates and your leadership team? If so, why? If not, why?
5. When did you last think about leaving our practice for a different job? Why? What made you stay?
6. What can I do to make your job better, and how will that help you?
7. What do you like about our office culture? What challenges you in our office culture?
8. Do you feel like your contributions are recognized and celebrated by your team?

Listen to the employee with the desire to understand, not to respond. Take notes and ask follow-up questions to grasp their concerns better. Resist the impulse to provide counter-arguments, defend, or solve problems. The response to the stay interview questions may illicit emotions of happiness, frustration, anger, or even confusion.

Keep in mind, the stay interview is not about the leader, it is about gaining insight from the employee perspective. If a team member is brave enough to share their perspective, gratitude should be the only reaction they receive.

Once the stay interview is complete, acknowledge their feedback. Let the employees know their input is valuable and that the practice is committed to making changes where possible. Thank the employee for the honest feedback, even if some of the answers were challenging to accept.

NEXT STEPS AFTER THE STAY INTERVIEW:

Discuss the findings of the stay interview with the leadership team. Evaluate any common themes across the employee feedback, whether positive or negative. Brainstorm ways to address the feedback from the stay interviews and address requests that cannot be acted upon.

Create a plan of action to address any issues raised during the stay interview, and keep the employee updated on progress being made towards improvement. If a stay interview is conducted and the feedback is not addressed or acted upon, it will only fuel the desire of the team to look for a practice where they feel their opinions will be valued.

After the changes are implemented, check in with the team and get their feedback. The power of the stay interview is not in the interview itself; the power comes from the lines of communication that it opens between leader and team member. Whether a change is made or perfectly executed is less important than the team feeling heard, understood, and valued.

Most leaders do not actively pursue feedback from their team because they cannot handle one more problem. Seeking out team feedback may seem scary at first; however, the rewards and the loyalty it garners pay massive dividends for the employee, the leaders, and the practice.

When practice leaders put employees first, the employees will put the patients and parents first.

“Employees who believe that management is concerned about them as a whole person – not just an employee – are more productive, more satisfied, more fulfilled. Satisfied employees mean satisfied customers, which leads to profitability.”

Anne M. Mulcahy

Published four times a year, Practice Management and Marketing News is a featured column in Pediatric Dentistry Today.



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