

How to make exit interviews count

Honest feedback from departing employees can help companies weed out flaws in the system

LIFFY THOMAS

When senior public relations executive Kritiga left her job of two years, drawn by better prospects in another organisation, she went through a 45-minute-long exit interview process with the HR Department.

From the time she submitted her resignation, they had multiple conversations with her, hoping to persuade her to reconsider her decision. A few days before the formal exit interview, the Chief Executive Officer talked to her.

"I gave honest reasons for leaving the organisation, but I thought the HR team was justifying each of its decisions," says Kritiga, who cited poor monetary benefits and better opportunities elsewhere for her decision to leave.

If done well, an exit interview (EI) – it could be a face-to-face conversation, a questionnaire or a combination of both – can help a company learn and evolve. However, very often, EIs fall flat and don't produce useful information or help in retaining employees, because the process is flawed.

Many progressive companies are either improvising their in-house exit interview process or outsourcing it to a third party with the objective of ensuring greater objectivity.

EI outsourced

Acengage, a Bengaluru-based company that works

with close to 60 companies, says the trend of companies seeking help from an external agency is on a rise. For EIs, they hire behavioural psychologists who will interact with outgoing employees over the telephone.

"There are companies that want our services on a month-on-month basis and others, on a periodic basis. Based on our post-exit survey, we help companies understand why employees leave and what they can do to check attrition," says Krish Hanumanthu., co-founder, Acengage. He says confidentiality is maintained and they also validate action taken by companies.

At Opteamix, an IT ser-

vices company, leaving employees are also asked to rate various programmes pertaining to learning and development and employee engagement during the EI.

Retention rate

Regardless of the methods employed, the effectiveness of an EI programme should be measured by the positive change it generates. At Allsec Technologies, a BPO, entry-level attrition, especially in the first 180 days, was a big challenge for the organisation. Lessons drawn from its exit interviews have helped the organisation reduce attri-

tion rate by 15% over the last two-and-a-half years.

Allsec phased out the traditional method of filling a questionnaire and introduced a conversation-based model which required the interviewer to take down the answers. More recently, it introduced telephonic exit interviews that can be given even after the employee has left the organisation.

"Getting feedback from 70% to 75% of employees who are quitting is big success for us, as it will help us work on them," says R. Vaithianathan, senior vice-pres-



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH RAVIKUMAR

We help companies understand why employees leave and what they can do to check attrition

ident (operations and HR) Allsec Technologies.

For the last couple of years, it has an "engagement group" that works closely with employees.

"Our mentoring programmes for employees during the first six months has helped remove inhibitions youngsters had about working in a BPO," says Vaithianathan, adding that lateral opportunities and continuous engagement programmes have also helped.

Disgruntled employees

Suresh Sambandam, founder and CEO of OrangeScape, a SaaS company based in Chennai, feels companies should not allow employees to come to the exit-interview stage. Such disgruntled employees must be identified early on for meaningful retention conversations.

"We generally identify people who are unhappy or are likely to leave, so we spend more time with them to see how they can be placed in a new role," says Sambandam who makes sure he has an interaction with every employee who has put in his papers.

"Our attrition rate is low."