

A photograph of a man in a suit speaking into a microphone, addressing a group of people in a meeting room. The background shows office windows with blinds. The title text is overlaid on the center of the image.

EMPLOYEE RETENTION: *THE POWER OF "STAY CONVERSATIONS"*

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Published on www.lorman.com - July 2017

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Employee Retention: The Power of “Stay Conversations”

by Mel Kleiman

Although a departing employee will often tell you they're leaving for “more money,” research studies continuously confirm the #1 reason great employees leave is because of their managers. In HR circles, there's even a saying for it: “People join companies and leave managers.”

This does not mean, however, that managers who lose good people are ineffectual jerks. On the contrary, the majority are competent professionals with good relationship skills. The problem is the majority of their time is devoted to dealing with each day's unexpected developments and the problems created by the team's mediocre players. In other words, the squeaky wheels get the oil and the most valued, reliable, workers are left feeling unseen and unappreciated --- which inevitably leads to wondering if the grass is greener elsewhere. Stay Conversations are a simple, effective way to keep this from happening.

Unlike Performance Reviews, which tend to focus on shortcomings and what the manager thinks, Stay Conversations are friendly, on-going casual discussions about your employees' job satisfaction, their ideas and opinions, as well as their short- and long-term goals and objectives.

Because employee engagement hinges directly upon the quality of the manager's relationship with his or her people, Stay Conversations are

a highly effective employee retention tool. They not only build positive relationships, but serve to continuously improve the employee's performance as well as their manager's.

The way it works is simple. Just have a question of the day or the week in mind and ask it as the opportunity arises --- when you pass by their desk or meet in the hall or lunchroom. You may want to have a longer, sit down chat once a year to discuss their experiences and long-term goals in depth, but it's the frequency of these short interactions that will keep team members feeling valued, appreciated, and, most importantly, listened to.

Suggested Stay Conversation Topics & Questions:

- 1. Relationships:** "How do you like working with the other members of your team?" "Is there anyone here you'd rather not work with?" "Do you feel you can speak with management openly and freely?" "Do I routinely do anything that frustrates you?"
- 2. Their Job:** "What could we do to make your job more satisfying or easier?" "What do you find most challenging or frustrating about your job and why?" "Do you have any skills or talents we're not using?"
- 3. The Organization:** "Have we made our mission and vision clear?" "Is there anything you'd like us to do in terms of community involvement?" "If there was one thing you could change about the company, what would it be and why?" "What's the biggest gripe you hear around here?" "What's the dumbest rule?"
- 4. Their Future:** "Are you interested in a promotion and do you know what it takes to earn one?" "Are you interested

in taking any job-related training or courses?" "Is there anything impeding your progress or holding you back?"

5. **Job Satisfaction:** "Do you feel we recognize your contributions?" "What kind of recognition or appreciation would be meaningful to you?" "On a scale of 1 – 10, how satisfied are you with your job and what would it take to make your response a higher number?" "What would another employer have to offer in order to get you to leave?"

For more suggested questions, subscribe to my blog where I post a new one every week: <http://humetrics.com/blog/>.

Mel Kleiman is a consultant, author, and Certified Speaking Professional on strategies for hiring and retaining the best hourly employees. He is the president of **Humetrics**, a developer of systems, training processes, and tools. Mel's books include the best-selling **Hire Tough, Manage Easy** and **The Five Firsts: A Simple System to Onboard, Engage & Retain Top Talent**.

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