

No matter when and where a meeting is held, structuring it with an agenda, preferably shared with participants in advance, helps everyone to prepare and use the time together efficiently. General suggestions for conducting a meeting are to:

- Start and end the meeting at the scheduled time.
- Begin with some informative announcements.
- Encourage all in attendance to share their ideas. Ask individuals about their thoughts if they appear reluctant to speak.
- In a family business, invite all family members to participate in periodic meetings whether they are involved in operations, ownership, or both.
- Set a comfortable atmosphere for open exchange of information and ideas.
- Keep notes of the decisions made, responsibilities delegated, and time frames established.
- If consistent with time limits and company style, consider asking for a round of brief comments from everyone at the start of the meeting, the end, or both.

The Exit Interview

Sooner or later every employee leaves. The most pleasant type of exit is when a trusted long-time employee retires. Such a termination is usually based on the mutual agreement of employer and employee.

Another type of termination is one that is employee initiated. When this is due to a better opportunity for the employee, it usually results in excitement for the employee and disappointment for the employer. On the other hand, if the employee is terminating because of dissatisfaction with the job, both the employee and employer may feel angry, though perhaps relieved as well. A third type is dismissal by the employer. When an employee is fired, both parties often harbor some anger.

Regardless of the circumstances of termination, understanding can be gained and antagonisms reduced through an exit interview. When well executed, an exit interview can yield valuable information about company morale and the attitude of employees toward their supervisors, management, and coworkers.

Exit interviews with both seasonal and full-time employees can produce useful information. One employer who has a large number of seasonal employees does the exit interview in a group setting. Four potential products of a deftly conducted exit interview are:

- Mutual understanding about the reasons for the termination
- Information about how operations are really running
- Suggestions for improving work procedures, alleviating problems, and developing better employee relations
- Reduced exposure to fallout from residual hostility



As with hiring interviews, planning makes exit interviews more likely to yield useful results. Some suggested questions (others can be found at AgHelpWanted.org) follow:

1. Could you tell me why you are leaving this firm?
2. Do you have another job yet? If yes, how does the new job compare with your job here, i.e., wages, hours, and working conditions?
3. Would you be leaving regardless of anything we could have done here? If not, under what conditions would you have wanted to stay?
4. When you were first employed here, how did you get to know about the duties and responsibilities of your job, and how long did it take before you were clear about them?
5. Since you first came here, have you had any surprises about the hours of work, working conditions, pay and benefits, or anything else?
6. Do you feel that your pay has been fair?
7. How did you feel about your opportunities to progress here?
8. During your employment here, did you always know who your immediate supervisor was and whom else you could go to with any problems?
9. Did you like your supervisor?
10. When you needed information or tools to do your job, did you ever have trouble getting either of them?
11. How did your immediate supervisor(s) handle your complaints and suggestions?
12. What suggestions do you have that would make this a better place to work?
13. If we had a job opening here and a good friend asked your advice about whether to apply, what would you tell him or her?

Though sometimes critical and difficult to hear, honest responses to these questions should contain information that proves valuable in guiding the selection of new employees and in other management practices in the operation.

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