

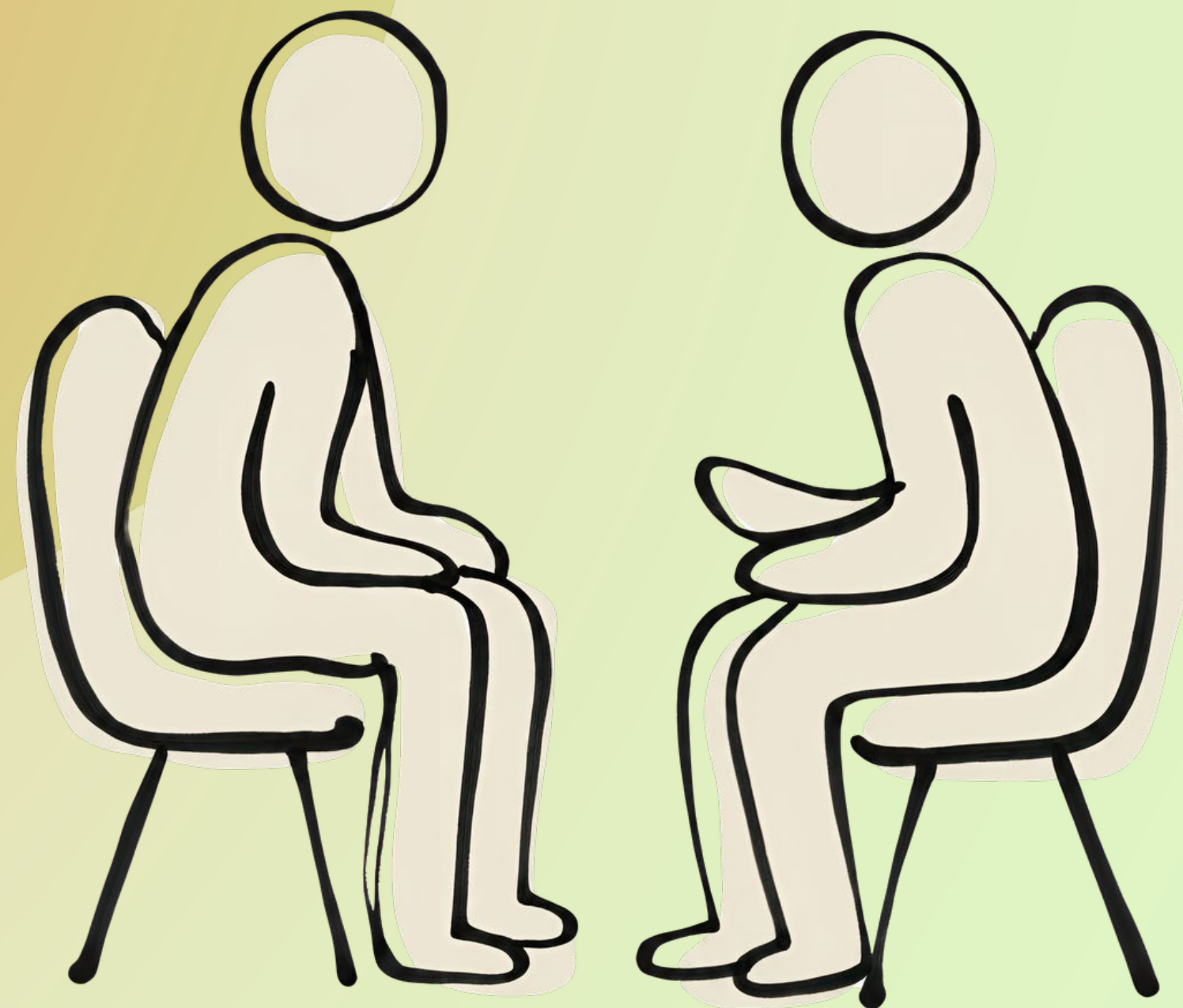
The Evolution of Stay Interviews

Building a Culture of Engagement,
Retention, and Continuous Improvement

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Presented to: NYSACHO Fall Summit

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Agenda

- History
- Purpose
- Impact

WHAT IS A STAY INTERVIEW?

A stay interview is a structured conversation between a supervisor and an employee designed to understand:

Why employees choose to remain with an organization

What motivates and engages them

What challenges they experience

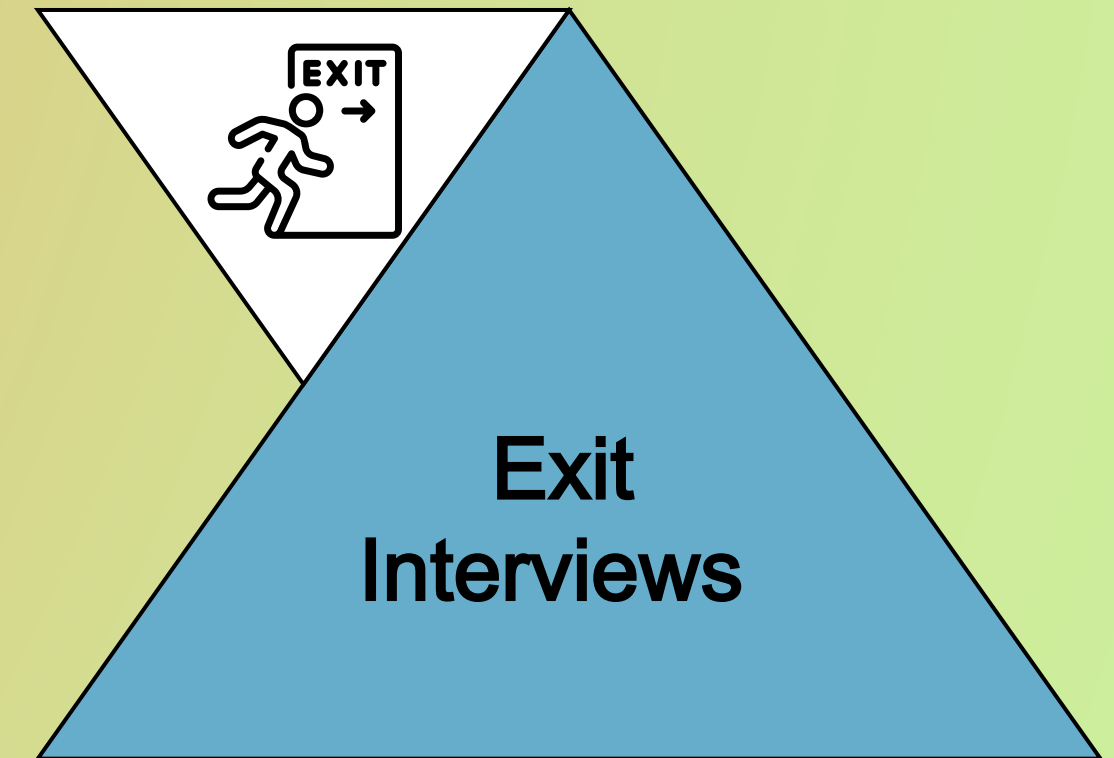
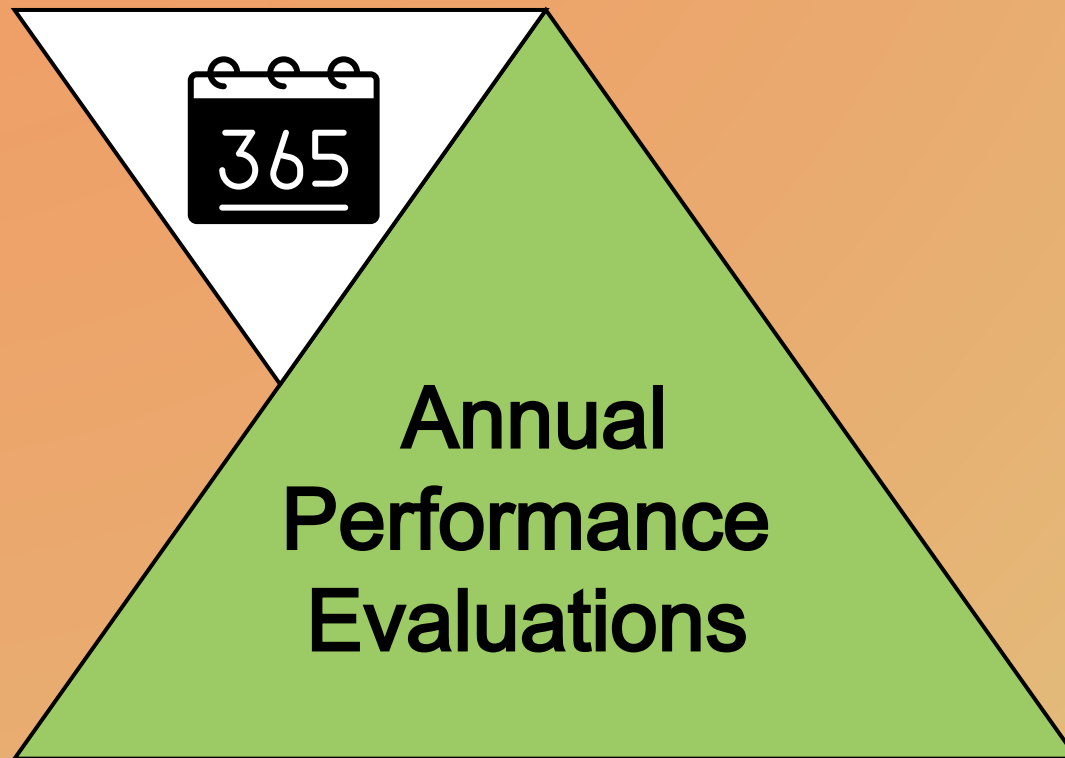
What could cause them to leave

What changes would improve their work experience

Unlike an exit interview, a stay interview occurs while employees are still engaged and can benefit from organizational improvements.

TRADITIONAL EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

Historically, organizations relied on:



While useful, these methods often identified concerns after employees had already decided to leave.



Recognizing the need for proactive retention strategies.

BIRTH OF THE STAY INTERVIEW

Stay interviews became more widely recognized during the early 2000s. Key influences included:

**Increasing
workforce
shortages**

**Rising
turnover
costs**

**Research on
employee
engagement**

**Recognition that
managers strongly
influence
employee
retention**

The concept shifted organizations from asking:

**"Why did you
leave?"**

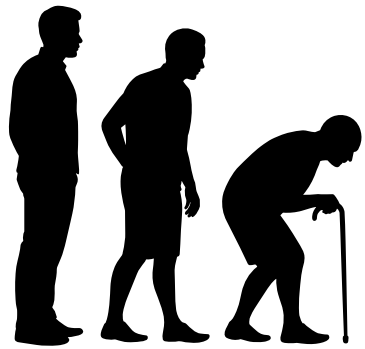


**"What will help you
stay?"**

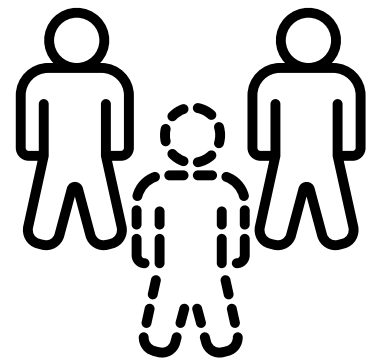
GROWTH DURING WORKFORCE SHORTAGES

Interest in stay interviews accelerated because of:

Aging
workforce



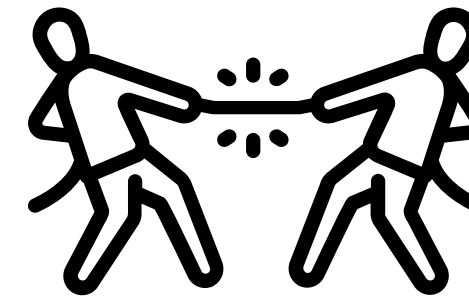
Healthcare
staffing
shortages



Public
Health
workforce
challenges



Increased
competition
for skilled
employees



COVID-19
pandemic
workforce
disruptions



Organizations realized retaining experienced employees was often more effective than continual recruitment.

COMMON STAY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Examples include:

What do you
enjoy most about
your work?

What keeps you
here?

What frustrates
you?

What talents are
you not using?

Do you have the
resources needed
to succeed?

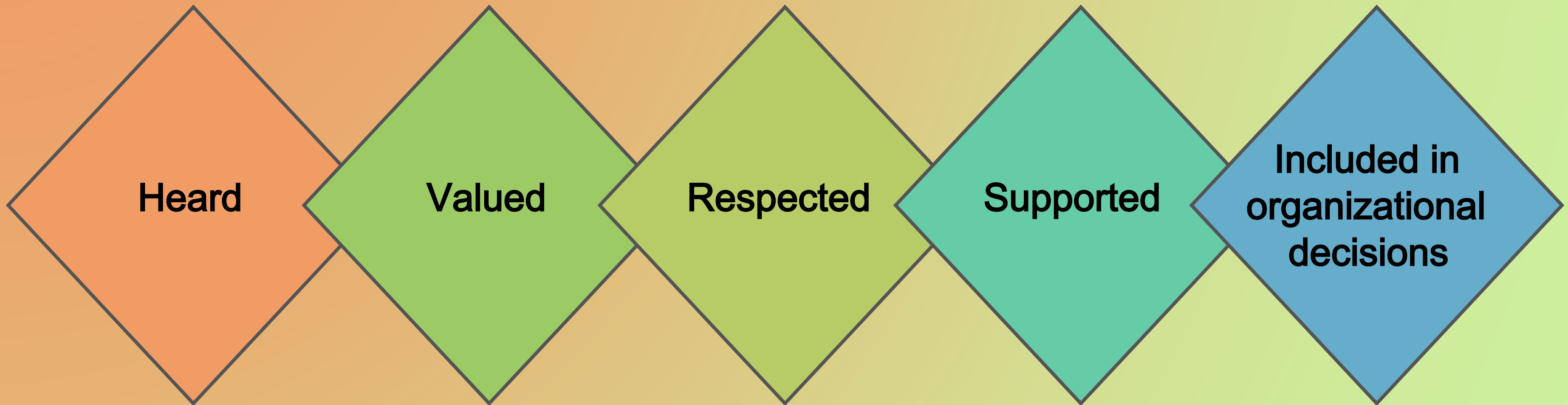
How can your
supervisor better
support you?

What might
cause you to
consider leaving?

What would make
this an even better
place to work?

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES

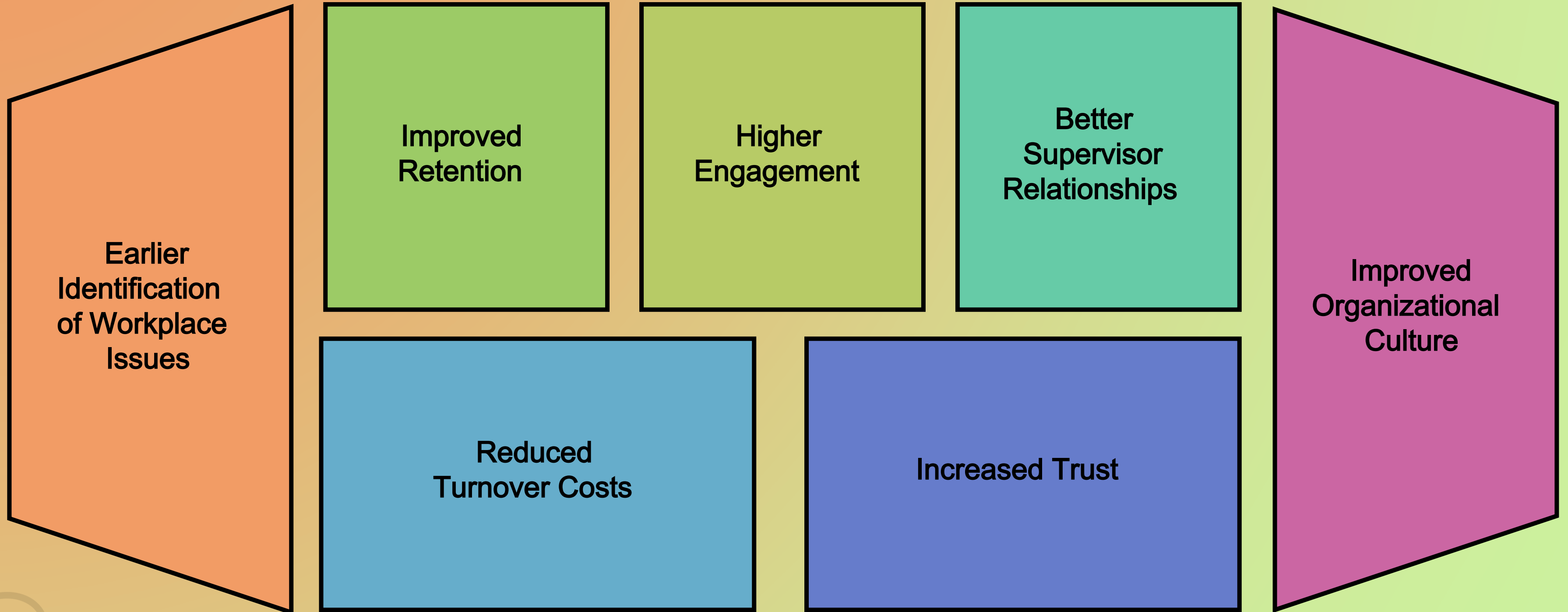
Stay interviews help employees feel:



Employees gain confidence that leadership wants to improve the workplace.

BENEFITS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations gain:



STAY INTERVIEWS VS. EXIT INTERVIEWS

Stay Interviews

- Prevent turnover
- Conducted during employment
- Allows action
- Builds trust
- Supports engagement

Exit Interviews

- Explain turnover
- Conducted after resignation
- Limited opportunity for change
- Provides historical information
- Supports organizational learning

WORRIED ABOUT TIME?

15 Minutes Now - or Months to Replace

15-Minute Stay Interview **15 MINUTES**

- Ask what keeps employees here
- Identify frustrations before they become resignations
- Learn what support, growth, or flexibility matters
- Strengthen trust and employee connection
- Action on small issues while they are still fixable

Local Government Hiring

WEEKS → MONTHS

- Vacancy approval/position review
- Job specification, civil service & position requirements
- Recruitment and application period
- Screening, interviews, and selection
- Background/reference/pre employment steps
- Onboarding, orientation, and time to full productivity

Retention Math: 15 minutes of listening < recruiting + vacancy coverage + lost institutional know

PUBLIC HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT (PHIG) APPLICATIONS FOR STAY

Development of the Stay Committee

Established to focus on employee engagement, retention, morale, and creating a workplace where employees want to stay and grow.

**Development of
policies and
infrastructure to
support
employee
recruitment,
retention, and
morale.**

Onboarding Team and Orientation Improvement

Developed a workplan to streamline and improve employee orientation, creating a meaningful introduction to who we are as a department and helping employees to connect, understand, experience, and belong.

STAY COMMITTEE

Investing in Our Employees and Workplace Culture

The committee helps us:

- Listen to employee feedback and identify opportunities for improvement
- Promote staff engagement and connection across programs and departments
- Develop activities that support morale, teamwork, and wellness
- Recognize employees and celebrate successes
- Create opportunities for staff to have fun and connect outside of day-to-day responsibilities
- Support employee retention and recruitment by strengthening our workplace culture

Why Now?

Through the Public Health Infrastructure Grant, we have dedicated time and resources to support this initiative and intentionally invest in activities that strengthen employee engagement, retention, and recruitment.

WHAT DOES THE STAY COMMITTEE DO?

Building Connection, Culture & Community

The Stay Committee coordinates and supports a variety of activities designed to bring staff together, build relationships, and make work more enjoyable.

Trivia
events

Euchre and other
card games

Dress-Down
Fridays

Staff lunches
and
gatherings

Music and
themed events

Kickball and
other team
activities

Employee
recognition and
celebrations

Teambuilding
activities and friendly
competitions

Opportunities for staff
to suggest and
develop new activities

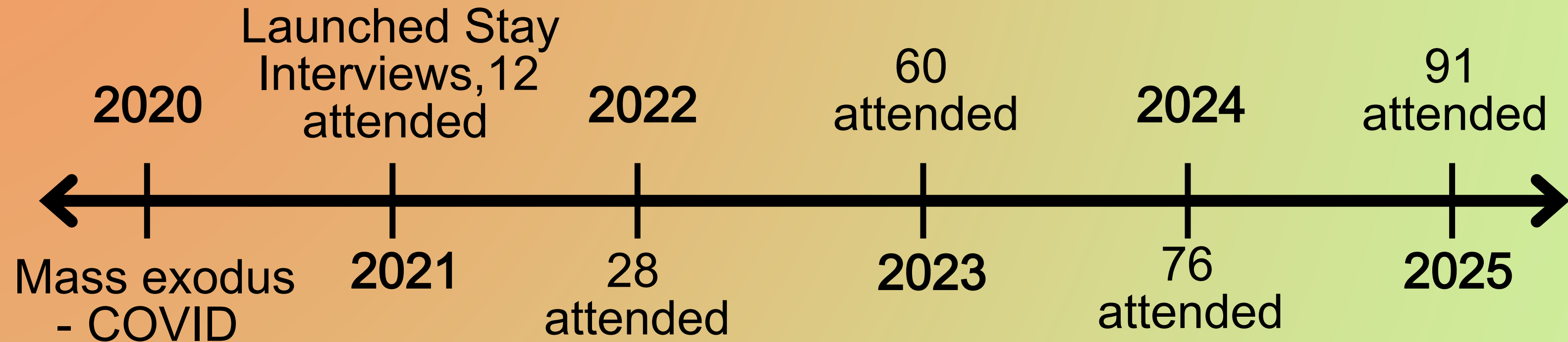
The Goal

A positive workplace culture doesn't happen by accident.

By intentionally creating opportunities for employees to connect, have fun, feel valued, and build relationships with one another, we hope to create a workplace that not only attracts great employees—but gives them reasons to stay.

CASE EXAMPLE

Livingston County Department of Health



Allowed peer recognition through a gift card to a

Housekeeping Rules

1. We don't air grievances about others.
2. No discussion of wages or CBA-related items.

Successes

- Stay Committee
- Technology improvements
- Coaching
- Kickball
- Remote work
- Staggered schedules
- Lunch and Learns

CASE EXAMPLE

Livingston County Department of Health

Things to Avoid in a Stay Interview:

Making it feel like an interrogation

Avoid rapid-fire questions or making the employee feel they need to defend their answers.

Getting defensive

If they say, "Management doesn't communicate well," don't immediately explain why.

Try: "Tell me more about what you've experienced."

Turning it into a performance review

Don't use the stay interview primarily to discuss attendance, productivity, mistakes, or areas where the employee needs improvement.

CASE EXAMPLE

Livingston County Department of Health

Things to Avoid in a Stay Interview (cont.):

Promising things you can't deliver

Avoid statements like “We'll definitely increase your pay” or “We'll fix that schedule.” Instead: “I'll look into what options are available.”

Asking leading questions

Instead of “You like working here, right?”, ask “What do you enjoy most about working here?”

Trying to solve everything immediately

Some concerns require HR, budget, policy, or organizational-level solutions. Listen first and determine what can realistically be addressed.

CASE EXAMPLE

Livingston County Department of Health

Things to Avoid in a Stay Interview (cont.):

Discussing other employees' situations

Don't compare the employee to coworkers or disclose confidential information about others.

Gossiping or criticizing leadership

You can acknowledge concerns without joining in: *"I understand why that situation was frustrating."*

Making it about yourself

Avoid spending the interview explaining how hard management has it or why certain decisions were made.

Asking whether they're looking for another job

You can ask about retention risk more appropriately: "What might cause you to consider leaving?"

CASE EXAMPLE

Livingston County Department of Health

Things to Avoid in a Stay Interview (cont.):

Treating complaints as disloyalty

A candid stay interview is actually a sign that the employee feels safe enough to tell you what they think.

Arguing with their perception

Even if you disagree with the employee's version of events, their perception is important information.

Asking overly generic questions

“Are you happy?” doesn't provide much actionable information. Ask about specific aspects of the job.

BEST PRACTICES

Successful organizations:

Conduct interviews
annually or every
12–18 months

Train
supervisors in
active listening

Maintain
confidentiality

Document themes
rather than
individual comments

Share
organizational
findings

Follow
through on
improvements

The most important step is acting on the feedback received.

STAY INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

Keep it simple: 20–30 minutes | Informal | Supervisor or Leader

Suggested Questions:

1. What do you look forward to when you come to work?
2. What keeps you working here?
3. What might cause you to consider leaving?
4. What can we do to make your job better or easier?
5. Do you feel valued and recognized?
 - a. What does meaningful recognition look like to you?
6. Are you able to use your strengths and skills in your current role?
7. What is one thing we could change that would make the biggest difference for you?
8. Is there anything else you want leadership to know?

Close the conversation with:

“Thank you for being honest. I may not be able to fix everything, but I will listen, look for patterns, and follow up on what we can improve.”

TRICKS & TIPS — START SMALL, DON'T GET OVERWHELMED

How to Get

Started

Start with a Pilot

- Begin with one department, team, or small group.
- You do not have to interview everyone at once.

Keep the Process Simple

- Use the same 5-8 questions.
- Schedule 20–30 minutes.
- Focus on listening—not defending or explaining.

Create “Quick Wins”

Small changes build trust. If employees repeatedly mention something that can easily be addressed—do it!

Look for Themes

- After several interviews, ask:
 - What are people saying repeatedly?
 - What can we fix quickly?
 - What requires longer-term planning?

Close the Loop

Let staff know: “We heard you. Here is what we learned, and here is what we are doing about it.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Stay interviews are:

Proactive
rather than
reactive

Evidence
informed

Most
successful when
leadership
follows through
on identified
improvements

Employee
centered

A valuable
workforce
development
tool

DISCUSSION

Questions for Leadership:

What are our
employees telling
us?

What themes are
emerging?

Which
improvements
can we
implement?

How will we
communicate
actions back
to staff?

How will we
measure success?

CLOSING

Employees are more likely to stay when they believe their voices matter.

Stay interviews provide organizations with an opportunity to listen intentionally, respond strategically, and create a workplace where employees can thrive.

By transforming employee feedback into meaningful action, organizations strengthen engagement, improve retention, and build a resilient workforce prepared to meet future challenges.

thank you!