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In Touch[®] Exit Interview Buying Guide

The employee exit interview has long been a popular tool widely used by HR professionals. There's no question that a well-crafted set of questions and a diligently managed program offer a proven way for obtaining valuable insights into organizational inefficiencies, manager deficiencies and opportunities for enhancing employee retention.

Nonetheless, there are a number of challenges that organizations face in deriving the most from their exit interview initiatives. First and foremost, soon-to-be-departing and former employees have a tendency to be reserved or circumspect about the feedback they provide. As long as the possibility exists that a reference might be needed one day from a former supervisor or employer, there's a natural reluctance not to "burn one's bridges".

A second challenge is organizing internally for the interviews to be conducted in a timely way. The availability of staff to conduct exit interviews ebbs and flows and in a surprising number of organizations. Communication is such that employees can be out the door before anyone in HR even knows they're gone.

A third challenge is constructing an effective interview tool. Although the content of many scripts seems useful on the surface, it's often the case that the information gleaned doesn't provide much insight into what – if anything - might have been done to retain a valued employee.

And ultimately, there's the matter of aggregating and analyzing the data collected. More often than not, the information collected is handwritten on sheets of paper. For it to be useful, someone needs to enter the data into a spreadsheet or database so that it can be sliced and diced in meaningful ways. This part of the process is laborious and time-consuming and as a result, it's often neglected.

In recognition of these hurdles, an increasing number of companies are electing to outsource their exit interview programs to companies such as In Touch that specialize in such undertakings. We consider our exit interview service to be among the best in the marketplace.

The following information is intended to highlight the ways exit interview vendors differentiate themselves within the marketplace. It also describes the unique way In Touch approaches delivering its service.

1. Interviewer Quality and Training

Vendors utilize a wide variety of backgrounds and training to qualify those who conduct their interviews. Some companies depend upon minimally credentialed call center employees who might spend their time multi-tasking around other assignments while they complete interviews. Others, such as **In Touch, require a minimum of a college education and several years of HR or other relevant administrative experience.** Some vendors assign a number of individuals to conduct interviews for a specific company. Others **assign a single individual to handle all interviews for a given client.** That is the approach In Touch has chosen. In our experience, by talking to a steady stream of individuals who worked for a particular company, an interviewer can develop subjective impressions that can be useful information in and of themselves. Historically, there have been several times when a client company's management has found it useful to consult with the assigned In Touch interviewer, an option that very few vendors can offer.

In Touch's current group of interviewers is comprised of independent contractors who work out of their homes. All of these individuals have been subject to background checks and are required to sign confidentiality agreements. They also bring distinguished empathy skills to the process and are required to participate in a training program that includes mock interviews. Because of the flexibility in their schedules, these interviewers are able to attempt to contact former employees at a time of the employee's convenience, rather than simply during business hours when the interview candidates might not be available. In addition, **In Touch provides a 24/7, toll-free number that the interview prospects can call to indicate a preferred interview time or to decline the interview.**

Another determinant of interviewer "quality" is the diligence used to try to get hold of the former employees. At one end of the spectrum, there are services that depend upon the initiative of former employees to call into them (i.e. in-bound interviewing). Similarly, there are on-line surveys that send out "invitations" to the voluntarily termed employees to request they participate. At the other end of the spectrum are those that utilize outbound calling programs to attempt to contact former employees. Here, there is the option to have the interviewers tasked to call multiple times or at different times of the day. **In Touch interviewers are expected to attempt to make contact both a minimum number of times and within multiple timeframes.**

Yet another distinguishing factor is the evaluation criteria used for rating and compensating interviewer performance. Variables include number of successful contacts, average time spent per interview, quality checking with interviewees and utility of data collected. In the case of In Touch, absolutely **no time constraints are placed on our interviewers.** We encourage them to take as long as they need to ask their questions, listen and then succinctly capture the responses.

And what is a successful completion rate? It depends. The largest single determinant is the accuracy of the contact data provided by the sponsoring company. It's not at all uncommon that phone numbers have not been updated in an HRIS system. On average, In Touch's interviewers are successful between 45% and 55% of the time. However,

when the contact information is accurate, that percentage to increases to 85% and sometimes more.

2. Interview Scripting

The variability around the interview instrument itself is also widespread. Some vendors insist on using a “canned” script, with or without the possibility of supplementing it with customized questions. One of the arguments for this approach is that the use of a largely standardized template facilitates “benchmarking”. However, research conducted around exit interview benchmarking suggests that trying to compare exit interview data between organizations is a difficult process at best. Other vendors promote a more customized approach to interview script design. In this regard, **In Touch takes pride in challenging its customers to think about qualitative questions that provide actionable insights into opportunities for changes that will improve retention.** For example:

“What could XYZ Company have done to keep you from leaving?”

“What do you think about the effectiveness of our company’s open door policy?”

“If you could speak directly with your former company’s CEO, what would you say?”

Suggesting thoughtful and offbeat questions is part of what sets In Touch apart.

3. Data Analysis Tools

One of the greatest challenges of an effective exit interview program is organizing and presenting the data in a compact, consistent and coherent manner. Typically, the data tends to be a mix of both qualitative and quantitative responses that spans numerous demographics and organizational subdivisions. At the front end of the data analysis challenge is recruiting interviewers who are good at distilling rambling commentaries down to a few succinct statements. This is one of the key skills that In Touch seeks in its exit interviewer hires. A second key component is a database that’s intuitive to use and has analytical flexibility. Some vendors do the analysis themselves, some develop in-house systems and some utilize purchased software. The latter is In Touch’s current approach. **The software we use is called “Checkbox Survey” and it’s sourced from a company called Prezza Technologies (www.prezzatech.com).** This powerful software works well for both facilitating interviewer data input and when needed, web-hosted surveying.

4. Pricing

There is a wide range of pricing models available in the market. Some companies charge for the number of names on the termination lists provided – regardless of success. Others, such as In Touch, **base their charges on the number of successful interviews.** Alternatively, In Touch will offer a price based on a service bundle.

Exit Interviews Plus In Touch Option

Although exit interviews are an excellent way to determine the reason(s) that employees have chosen to leave a company, **the ultimate challenge for any organization remains how best to keep the best and brightest from leaving.**

There's a substantial body of research confirming that the majority of employees don't choose to leave an organization because they desire better pay or benefits. Rather, they're seeking better opportunities for professional development, a change in responsibilities, scheduling flexibility and/or a better manager. If a company can intervene proactively and address an employee's frustrations relative to such job change motivators, retention can be improved.

The most common way for developing "leading indicators" of employee frustration is the employee attitude survey. These massive undertakings are typically conducted every one or two years and they are good at providing actionable insights into a variety of employee concerns. The major limitations are cost, obtaining a high level of employee participation and the lack of "real time" feedback.

To address this shortcoming, many companies rely on an open-door philosophy as a way of learning about employee issues. The belief is that frustrated employees will discuss their concerns and issues with their manager, HR representative or some other appropriate individual. Unfortunately, the reality is that many employees simply don't trust using the open door. Corporate lore is filled with stories of employees being terminated, retaliated against or having their careers derailed for speaking their minds.

A supplemental or alternative way to encourage employees to speak-up regarding questions and concerns is an In Touch helpline. This award-winning tool works because anything an employee says can be completely confidential and anonymous. All an employee needs to do to use In Touch is dial a toll-free number, record his or her issue on an automated messaging system or communicate it to a trained operator and hang-up. Within one business day, a transcription or report of the employee's concern is on its way to the sponsoring company to be acted upon. An assigned case number makes it possible for the company to communicate back to the employee and can keep the employee anonymous. The employee is instructed on how to use that case number to check back for updates, requests for additional information or a resolution of their concern.

Ironically, many companies employ similar mechanisms for "whistleblowing" and code of conduct complaints. The problem is that these aren't positioned to generate the type of feedback that will enhance retention. For a detailed explanation of this distinction, readers might want to review the "Helpline Buying Guide" that's also posted on In Touch's website.

What's the benefit of an In Touch helpline program? It's an influx of candid and timely feedback – feedback that in the main is actionable. Exactly the kind of feedback that indicates where there is frustration and a need for intervention. And therein are the opportunities for improving retention!

The annual cost of a program that includes **both In Touch and exit interviews in multiple languages** - is somewhere in the neighborhood of **\$3.00 per employee per year**. Does it work? Absolutely – and we have scores of companies who will attest to the value they have received by being able to address smoldering concerns before they erupt into something more severe.

When the day is done, it's not just about having the information that can be generated by an outsourced exit interview program. Rather, it's about providing employees with a way to warn you before they're out the door. It might just be the best investment you'll ever make!

THE IN TOUCH EXIT INTERVIEW DIFFERENCE

- Customized interview formats designed to provide actionable insights.
- Highly skilled and trained interviewers who don't work in a call center environment.
- A single, dedicated interviewer assigned to each client company.
- An outbound calling approach that incorporates multiple attempts to contact on varying days at varying times.
- Interview candidate considerations that include a toll-free number to be used for indicating a preferred time for a call or declining to participate.
- No time constraints placed on interviewers
- Premium placed on interviewer ability to capulate lengthy qualitative responses
- Flexible, intuitive and access level controlled web-hosted data analysis software
- Industry leading interview completion rates
- Highly cost-effective opportunity to enhance retention by bundling an exit-interview program with the award-winning In Touch employee helpline program.