

4 Warning Signs an Employee Plans to Quit—and What to Do About It

The costs associated with recruiting and training a new employee can be significant, especially for roles that require more experience. That's why retaining your employees, particularly your top performers, is so important. To help you manage costly turnover, here are some warning signs that an employee is about to leave—and what you can do about it.

Warning Signs:

- **Decline in work quality and/or quantity.** Your employee's track record has always been to show up early, stay late, and crank out stellar work. While there may have been small dips in their performance here and there, this is different. Now you're seeing that while their work isn't exactly subpar, it's not up to their usual standards. You're concerned because you've noticed their work effort has declined recently.
- **Lack of interest in high-profile work.** Many top performers like to be part of high-profile projects and teams. If an employee shows a lack of interest, after wanting to get involved in projects in the past, it could be a sign that they don't see themselves working for you long-term.
- **Dip in engagement.** At staff meetings, they may have less input than before, or perhaps their contributions have been more superficial lately. They may also seem less interested in going out to lunch with colleagues or attending company functions than in the past.
- **More friction.** An employee who typically gets along with colleagues is suddenly becoming difficult to work with. The employee may be complaining a lot more than usual, perhaps about minor things that have always been a part of their job.





Your Action Plan:

- **Be proactive.** While a certain amount of turnover is inevitable, there are steps employers can take to help improve retention before these warning signs appear. Administering employee surveys and conducting exit interviews with departing employees can help you assess employee satisfaction and engagement over your entire workforce. This will allow you to course-correct if needed. A growing number of employers are also conducting “stay interviews,” asking their employees why they work for the company and what could cause them to leave.
- **Don't make assumptions.** If you notice any changes to an employee's work performance or attitude, don't assume you know the cause. While the above warning signs could reflect that the employee plans to leave, it could also mean there's something else going on. For instance, an employee subjected to sexual harassment might exhibit some of the same behaviors, such as not wanting to show up to meetings or disengaging from company activities.
- **Meet with the employee.** Schedule a discussion with the employee in private. Start the meeting by expressing your appreciation for their contributions and be straightforward. Let them know that you've noticed changes in their performance and/or attitude and give examples. Ask if there's anything you can do to help and then give them an opportunity to speak. If they don't have an explanation at this point, try being more direct. For instance, you could tell them that experience tells you that these are often the warning signs that an employee wants to leave their job, and you want to know whether this or anything else is the cause of their change in behavior.
- **Listen to the employee.** If the employee reveals that they are considering a job elsewhere, ask them if there's anything you could do to keep them onboard. Regardless of how much you want to keep the employee, avoid making any promises.



Conducting **exit interviews** can help you assess employee satisfaction and engagement.



If you notice changes to an **employee's performance** or attitude, don't assume you know the cause.



Schedule a meeting with the employee in private, and let them know that you've noticed changes in their performance.





Develop policies, practices, and benefits that reflect your company's values and effectively motivate and retain employees.

Note: If the employee tells you that workplace misconduct has impacted their performance and attitude, launch a prompt, impartial, and thorough investigation. Keep in mind that the information the employee shares may trigger additional obligations. For instance, if the employee reveals that a disability is the reason their performance has declined, you may be required to provide the employee with a reasonable accommodation.

- **Consider your options.** Assess your options for addressing what the employee needs in order to stay with your company. Think about the whole picture, including the employee's value and potential cost to your company.
- **Follow up.** Schedule a follow-up meeting with the employee and talk about options to help improve engagement. Document each step of the process and keep a record of your conversation and action plan.

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