
Every Exit Has a Story

A Practical Guide to **Exit Interviews** That Capture Honest Feedback and Create Real Change



*Connecting top talent
to meaningful work.*

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Why Exit Interviews Still Matter

For a long time, exit interviews had a reputation for being “too little, too late.” They happened at the very end, the questions felt generic and the insights rarely led to meaningful change.

That’s why many organizations have shifted toward stay interviews, which are still incredibly important. When you ask people what they need while they’re still with you, you have the opportunity to listen in real time and act before issues escalate.

At the same time, we’ve learned that stay interviews don’t always tell the whole story.

When someone is still inside your organization, there’s often a natural filter. People may hold back, soften their feedback or avoid naming things that feel uncomfortable or risky to say out loud, even in the healthiest cultures.

That’s why, in our experience, exit interviews still matter.



Exit interviews are often the moment when people can finally speak with clarity and distance. It’s when they’re able to share:

- > what they truly experienced
- > what they tried to work through
- > what ultimately tipped the scale
- > and what didn’t feel safe or relevant to say earlier

When done well, exit interviews don’t replace stay interviews — they complete the picture.

Exit interviews help you separate:

- > Healthy turnover (someone outgrows the role, relocates, or makes a life decision)
- > Avoidable turnover (growth paths aren’t visible, leadership is inconsistent, workload becomes unsustainable, culture feels “fine” but not memorable)

And sometimes the biggest insight is not a complaint, it’s a pattern of “neutral.”

If you’ve ever read exit feedback and thought, “This isn’t bad... but it’s not great either,” that’s a signal. Neutral is where engagement quietly leaks.

This guide is designed to help you run exit interviews that are thoughtful, practical and genuinely useful — and to turn that learning into improvement.

What Exit Interviews Are and What They're Not

Before getting into the mechanics, it's important to ground exit interviews in the right intent.

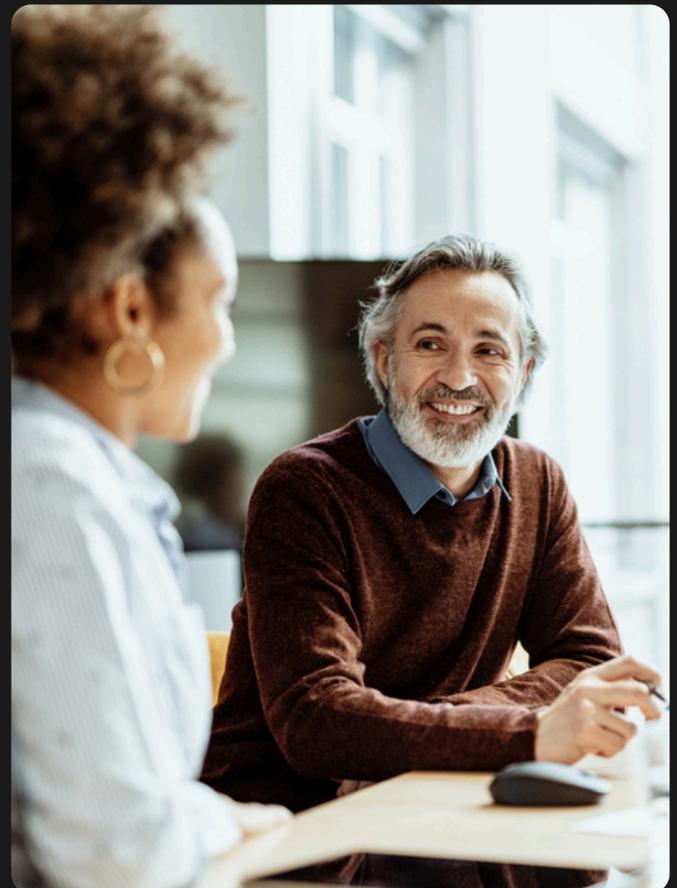
Exit Interviews Are...

- > A learning tool, not a negotiation
- > A way to understand patterns, not to litigate individual situations
- > An opportunity to listen without defensiveness
- > A chance to improve the experience for those who stay
- > Conducted by senior leaders or HR

Exit Interviews Are Not...

- > A performance review
- > A last attempt to convince someone to stay
- > A place to explain or justify decisions
- > A box to check during offboarding

When exit interviews drift into any of the above, trust erodes and insight is lost.



When and How to Run Exit Interviews



When

- > Send the exit survey shortly after notice is given
- > Hold the live interview as close to the last day as possible for true candor
- > Avoid the employee's final day if possible, when logistics and emotions compete for attention

How

- > Keep the conversation to ~30 minutes
- > Let HR or a neutral third party lead when possible
- > Choose a quiet, private setting

Why These Conversations Can Feel Hard, but Worth It

Exit interviews can be uncomfortable, even for experienced HR and people leaders.

They surface feedback you may not have heard earlier. They can challenge long-held assumptions. They sometimes highlight moments where someone felt unsupported, overlooked or stuck — even when intentions were good.

That discomfort isn't a sign the conversation is going poorly. It's usually a sign you're hearing something real.

When someone is already on their way out, the stakes change. People tend to speak more plainly. They stop softening feedback. They name the gaps between what was intended and what was experienced.

Handled with care, exit interviews help you:

- Separate healthy turnover (natural career progression, life changes, role fit) from avoidable turnover (unclear growth paths, inconsistent leadership, unsustainable scope)
- Understand why people leave even when they like the organization
- Identify where growth, leadership or role clarity quietly fall short
- Catch patterns early, before they show up as broader retention issues

It's human to feel defensive when feedback hits close to home, especially when it involves leadership, culture or decisions you've worked hard on.

What matters most in those moments is how you respond and truly listening to that feedback.



How We've Learned to Approach Exit Interviews at Altis

Over time, we've learned that the most useful exit interviews don't hinge on a single moment or format. What's worked best for us is treating them as a two-part experience, with each part serving a slightly different purpose.

Part 1: The Exit Survey

We use the survey as a starting point. It gives people space to reflect privately and respond in their own words, without the pressure of a live conversation. We've found that people are often more candid when they have time to think things through.

The survey tends to help us:

- > Capture more quantitative data across exits
- > Understand what contributed to someone's decision to leave
- > See when that decision started forming
- > Create consistency across exits so patterns emerge over time

Part 2: The Live Exit Interview

The live conversation adds a layer the survey can't capture on its own. This is where context, nuance and tone come through. It's where people explain *why* something mattered, not just that it did.

In our experience, the live conversation often:

- > Provides richer qualitative insight and nuance
- > Surfaces things that didn't feel safe or relevant to write down
- > Brings clarity to survey responses that felt vague or neutral
- > Helps us understand how decisions were experienced, not just how they were made

We don't treat the live interview as a repeat of the survey. Instead, we use it to explore what stood out, clarify what we didn't fully understand and listen for themes across multiple exits.

This two-part approach has helped us move beyond surface-level feedback and into insights we can actually learn from. It may not be the only way to run exit interviews, but it's what's worked best for us, and it's a model you can adapt in a way that fits your organization.

How to Set the Tone

Exit interviews work best when they feel safe and like a true conversation.

Start by clearly naming the purpose:

"Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. This conversation isn't about changing your decision — it's about learning from your experience.

What you share will be kept confidential. We don't report feedback directly back to your team or leader. Instead, HR looks for themes across conversations so we can improve the employee experience overall.

We may share high-level, anonymous trends with senior leadership to guide action planning, but individual comments won't be attributed. We really appreciate your openness."

A few important reminders:

- Reassure confidentiality upfront
- Be transparent about how insights will be shared
- Avoid routing feedback directly back to teams in a way that could break trust
- Normalize honesty, even when it's uncomfortable

When employees understand what happens with their feedback, they're far more likely to speak candidly.

Part I Template: Exit Survey

This survey should be sent shortly after notice is given, and before the live interview. It gives the employee time to reflect and sets the foundation for a more meaningful conversation.

2026 Exit Survey

As you prepare to move on to your next adventure, we'd love to hear about your time with us! By sharing your experiences, you'll help us understand what we're doing right and where we can improve. We use this information to make our workplace better for everyone.

1. What is your primary reason for leaving?

- Career advancement / career change
- Compensation / benefits
- Job scope
- Leaving the industry
- Leadership
- Personal reasons
- Relocation
- Retirement
- Other (please explain)

2. If you selected "Other," please explain.

3. At what point did you first start thinking about leaving, and what triggered it?

4. What could we have realistically done to retain you?

5. What aspects of our culture helped you succeed and what aspects made it harder?

6. How reasonable was your workload on a day-to-day basis?

- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

7. What most affected your ability to perform at your best?

8. How would you rate the opportunities for growth and development?

★ 1 ★★ 2 ★★★ 3 ★★★★ 4 ★★★★★ 5

9. How effective was your leader in supporting your growth and development?

- Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- Somewhat ineffective
- Not effective

10. How would you rate your compensation and benefits?

★ 1 ★★ 2 ★★★ 3 ★★★★ 4 ★★★★★ 5

11. What changes felt hardest to navigate, and why?

12. What advice do you have for senior leadership?

13. Is there anything you didn't feel comfortable saying while employed that you want to share now?

14. Would you recommend this organization as a place to work?

- Definitely
- Probably
- Not sure
- Probably not
- Definitely not

15. Would you be open to a voluntary exit interview?

If you're open to it, we'd love to connect for a brief, informal exit interview to learn more about your experience. The conversation would take about 30 minutes and can be scheduled at a time that works for you. Thank you for your contributions, and we wish you all the best moving forward.

★ 1 ★★ 2 ★★★ 3 ★★★★ 4 ★★★★★ 5

Part 2 Template:

Live Exit Interview Conversation (30 Minutes)

Exit Interview

- Exit Interview Date: _____
- HRBP Conducting Interview: _____
- Start Date: _____

- Last Day: _____
- Tenure: _____

1. Reason for Leaving:

- Why have you decided to leave? Was a specific event or circumstance responsible for this decision?
- Is there anything we could have done differently to retain you?

2. New Opportunity:

- Where will you be working next, and what does the new role or company offer that encouraged you to accept their offer?
- Are there specific growth or development opportunities at the new company that we could not offer? [Gather insight into the advantages of their new position.]

3. Company and Team Culture:

- How do you perceive our company culture and team dynamics? What were the positives and areas for improvement?
- Were there any challenging team members, and how did these dynamics impact your experience? [Understanding team relationships and cultural factors influencing their decision.]

4. Compensation and Benefits:

- Did you feel that the total rewards package (compensation, benefits, paid leave, development opportunities) was fair and aligned with your needs?
- Was there something lacking in our package that you found elsewhere? [Clarifying whether compensation or benefits played a role in their departure.]

5. Job Responsibilities and Expectations:

- Did your job responsibilities align with what you were promised during the interview process? Were your goals clear, and did you have the tools to succeed?
- What should we emphasize to future hires about this role to ensure their expectations are met? [Clarify job satisfaction and potential improvements for onboarding new hires.]

6. Career Growth and Development:

- How well did your role align with your career goals, and did you see a clear path for growth within this organization?
- How could we have better supported your career development? [Understand whether growth opportunities influenced the decision to leave.]



7. Management and Leadership:

- How was your relationship with your direct leader? Did you receive constructive feedback and feel recognized for your contributions?
- What improvements could be made in management style or leadership communication? [Gather feedback on leadership styles and management effectiveness.]

8. Morale, Motivation and Team Dynamics:

- How would you describe the morale and motivation within your team?
- Were there any underlying issues or recognition of team members you noticed that perhaps leadership is unaware of? [Understand broader team morale and identify areas needing attention.]

9. Inclusion and Diversity:

- Did you feel included and that diversity is valued here? Were there any processes or systems that felt exclusionary or inefficient? [Gauge the inclusivity and operational effectiveness within our company.]

10. Opportunities and Growth Elsewhere:

- What opportunities are present in your new role that we were unable to offer?
- What more could we have done to meet your growth needs? [Clarify the specific growth opportunities that the new company provides.]

11. Recommendations for Senior Leadership:

- What advice would you give our senior leadership regarding strategic direction, growth or culture?
- Do you foresee any risks of other team members leaving, and why? [Gather strategic insights and potential risks for retention.]

12. Final Thoughts and Future Improvements:

- What final thoughts would you like to share to help us understand your decision and improve as a company? [Encourage open feedback for continuous improvement.]



After the Interview: Turning Insight Into Action

Shortly after the conversation, we recommend capturing a brief written reflection while the details are still fresh.

- From your conversation, what are your impressions and what do you feel led to the employee's decision to leave? [Provide HR's perspective based on the interview.]
- Did anything surface that felt new, surprising or inconsistent with other exit feedback?
- Recommended HR actions based on this exit interview: [Outline actionable steps for retention, leadership feedback or policy changes.]

From there, outline any actions that may be worth exploring based on what you heard.

Before jumping to change, take a moment to synthesize. Ask yourself: is this an isolated experience, or part of a broader theme?

This might include:

- Leadership feedback or coaching themes
- Role clarity or scope adjustments
- Career progression or development conversations
- Policy or process updates
- Broader themes to watch across future exits

Where appropriate, insights can inform coaching conversations with leaders. If a clear and consistent theme is emerging, HR can partner with leaders to address it thoughtfully throughout the year.

At the same time, it's important to protect confidentiality. Individual feedback should not be routed directly back to a team or manager in a way that could identify the person who shared it. That can quickly erode trust, not just with the departing employee, but with those who remain.

Instead, we recommend reviewing exit data, both quantitative and qualitative, on a regular cadence (quarterly or annually). When shared upward, it should be presented in aggregate form, with names and identifying details removed. This allows senior leadership to spot trends and set clear action plans, while maintaining psychological safety.



Examples of how you'd report back to your executive leadership team:

Example One

✗ Instead of:

"Three people said their manager didn't talk about development."

✓ You'd present it like this:

Theme: Career Path Visibility

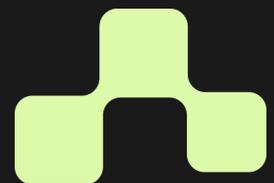
- 67% of recent voluntary exits cited growth or advancement as a factor
- Multiple interviews referenced unclear next steps within role progression
- Feedback suggests employees value the organization but feel uncertain about internal mobility

What we're seeing:

This appears less about dissatisfaction and more about visibility and structure.

Recommended exploration:

- Review the clarity of career path documentation across departments
- Equip leaders with simple development conversation templates
- Consider mid-year growth check-ins for high-performing employees



Example Two

✗ Instead of:

"People feel overwhelmed."

✓ You'd present it like this:

Theme: Role Scope & Capacity

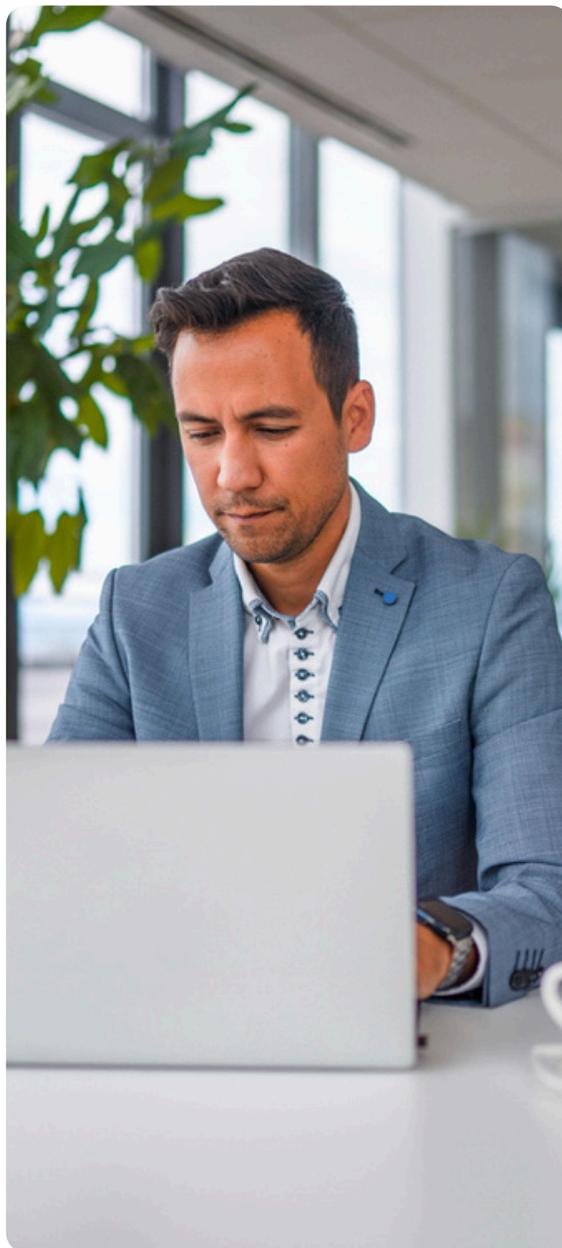
- 60% of recent exits referenced workload or scope expansion
- Feedback indicates growth in responsibility without parallel realignment of priorities or resources
- Employees describe a strong commitment but increasing ambiguity around boundaries

What we're seeing:

This may signal role drift rather than performance gaps.

Recommended exploration:

- Audit the top 10 roles that have grown most in scope over 12 months
- Revisit priority-setting frameworks with leadership
- Clarify decision ownership in cross-functional work



Not every exit interview will result in immediate change, and that's okay. The goal is not to react to every data point, but to notice patterns, protect trust and act thoughtfully over time.

Exit interviews aren't about perfection — they're about progress.

When approached with care, they help organizations slow down, reflect and learn from moments of transition. They offer insight into what's working, what's quietly getting in the way and where attention may be needed next.

“

*Progress comes from
listening honestly —
even when the feedback
is hardest to hear.*

”

-Alia Dean, Director, People & Culture

If you have any questions, please contact us: altisteam@altis.com.