

LESLIE W. BRAKSICK, PH.D.



UNLOCKING SUCCESS

# Why wait for exit interviews?

## How your company can retain your best and brightest employees

When unwanted attrition happens, the usual reaction is, “Why? Where are they going?” Most organizations use the exit interview to answer these questions. An HR professional meets with the departing person and attempts to learn the good, bad and ugly about why they are leaving. Unfulfilled promises and hopes are revealed as the interviewer shrinks in chagrin, wishing this critical information had been discovered sooner.

If the departing talent is senior in the firm, or in a key role, the departure interview will be shared with the company’s top executives and board of directors. Here the “why” questions intensify. The board will pepper the CEO and chief human resource officer with questions such as, “What were the warning signs? Why weren’t they heeded? What have we learned from this terrible loss? Are we at risk with others? How do we prevent this from happening again?”

These are precisely the right questions to ask. But why wait for the loss to happen, or even the threat of loss to appear, to know the answers?

### Staying connected

We know that the millennial generation will be employed by an average of six different companies during their working lives. We also know that they are extremely connected. LinkedIn and Facebook constantly push information on new/available opportunities to subscribers, so one doesn’t even have to seek new opportunities or wait for a recruiter’s call. These vehicles also enable departing

employees to stay in touch with their former colleagues, independent of communication vehicles that touch the employer. Alumni networks of former employers, colleges and professional associations are powerful magnets pulling on the brightest and best talent, all the time.

So how do company leaders stay in tune with what’s *really* happening with their brightest and best? How can they *really* know what their star talent is feeling or what might cause them to leave?

It’s easier than you think. Engagement surveys are not the answer, although they can be barometers of company culture and leadership. The best way to know how your employees are feeling is *to simply ask them in a one-on-one conversation*. Ask the same questions you’d use in an exit interview — but don’t wait until they leave to do so!

One of the many gifts of the millennial generation is their comfort level with directness and transparency. They are straight shooters with one another and value when they receive it from others. Just ask them the questions you want to know. And tell them directly how much you and the company value them.

And don’t assume they know what growth potential exists for them in your organization. For most millennials, advancement within companies happens too slowly, in contrast to their expectations.



### Be direct

This is all the more reason why executives and senior HR leaders need to budget time by having direct, crucial conversations that yield immediate understanding of what matters most to these key employees — and that conveys clearly how much they are valued/appreciated, and what their future can be within the current company.

What are the most effective tools for preventing the unwanted loss of our brightest and best talent? They lie in our *leadership behaviors*. Don’t wait for an exit interview to know why your top talent is leaving.

Instead, have those crucial conversations early enough to discover how to prevent the departures from ever happening. ●

**Leslie W. Braksick, Ph.D., MPH** is co-founder of CLG Inc., co-author of “Preparing CEOs for Success: What I Wish I Knew” and author of “Unlock Behavior, Unleash Profits.” Braksick and her colleagues help executives motivate and inspire sustained levels of high performance from their people. You can reach her at (412) 269-7240 or lbraksick@clg.com. For more information, visit [www.clg.com](http://www.clg.com).



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With Leslie W. Braksick on LinkedIn  
<http://linkd.in/15mSjJE>