THE PEOPLE PLAYBOOK · SOP 4 OF 4

Retaining

Book Four of the People Playbook for [FIRM NAME]

Document owner	[PEOPLE LEAD]
Approved by	[APPROVER]
Applies to	All employees of [FIRM NAME]
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Part of The Law Firm Operating System Implementation Workbook

Contents

1. How to Use This Standardized Operating Procedure (SOP)

This is Book Four of the People Playbook. Books One through Three hire a person, settle them, and develop them. This document is about keeping them, and about handling it well when they go anyway. It runs continuously and alongside Book Three rather than after it.

Book	Covers	Ends At
Book One: Recruiting and Hiring	Requisition through signed offer.	The signed conditional offer and a cleared background check.
Book Two: Onboarding	Signed offer through Day 90.	The Day 90 decision.
Book Three: Developing	Day 91 onward.	Continuous. Runs for as long as the person is employed.
Book Four: Retaining	Engagement, compensation cadence, turnover, and separations.	Continuous.

A low turnover ratio is in direct relationship to the firm's ability to lead people well and give them reason to believe a better future is available to them here. Your people will work from roughly twenty-five to sixty-five. Part of the job of ownership is making this the place they want to spend those years.

1.1 The Seven Drivers

Retention has seven levers. Sections 3 through 9 take them one at a time.

Driver	The Claim
Competitive Compensation and Benefits	Pay is the floor rather than the strategy, and underpaying is incompatible with a firm that runs without you.
Career Growth and Development	People leave when they conclude no advancement is available to them, and they say so years later.
Work Environment and Culture	If you want people in the building, making the building worth coming to is the owner's job.
Leadership and Management	People do not leave firms. They leave leaders. This is the dominant variable.
Recognition and Rewards	Incentives reward going beyond the job. They do not buy the job itself.
Engagement and Involvement	Engagement raises the emotional cost of leaving, which is the only cost a competitor cannot outbid.
Addressing Concerns Promptly	Every unanswered concern ends in a departure, and the departing person names not being listened to as the reason.

1.2 Before You Use It: Customize These Six Things

Placeholder	Replace With
[FIRM NAME]	Your firm's name.
[PEOPLE LEAD]	Whoever owns the people system end to end. Owns the turnover number and the concerns log.
[MANAGER]	The employee's direct supervisor.
[APPROVER]	Owner, managing partner, or Chief Operating Officer (COO). Approves compensation corrections and signs every separation.
[SURVEY MONTH]	The month the annual engagement survey runs. Pick one and hold it.
[COMP REVIEW MONTH]	The month the annual market assessment runs. Place it two to three months before [RAISE MONTH] in Book Three.

This Is a Template, Not Legal Advice

Separations, final pay, benefits continuation, references, and severance are governed by federal, state, and sometimes municipal law, and the rules differ sharply by jurisdiction. Compensation decisions can create pay-equity exposure that stays invisible until it is expensive.

Have employment counsel licensed in your state review this document, and involve counsel before any involuntary separation.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Owns	Does Not Own
[PEOPLE LEAD]	The turnover number and its diagnosis. The annual market assessment. The engagement survey and the report back. The concerns log. Exit interviews. The offboarding checklist. Reporting all of it to [APPROVER] quarterly.	Individual pay decisions, which belong to [APPROVER].
[MANAGER]	Stay conversations with their own people. Raising a flight risk early. Recognition inside their team. Receiving and acting on concerns. Their own department's turnover number.	Conducting the exit interview for their own departing report. See Section 12.
[APPROVER]	Approving off-cycle compensation corrections. Signing every separation. Owning the payroll ratio. Acting on a leader whose department is bleeding people.	Hearing about a resignation for the first time on the day it happens.
Department Leaders	The experience of working in their department, which is the single largest retention variable the firm controls.	Deciding whether their own turnover is a problem. That assessment sits with [PEOPLE LEAD] and [APPROVER].

3. Compensation and Benefits

Compensation is the minimum you pay someone to come and work for you. It does not buy discretion, effort, or loyalty, and firms that believe paying someone entitles them to obedience are describing a labor market that no longer exists.

3.1 The Three Numbers

Number	The Rule
Market Plus 10% (The Target)	Pay 10% above market. An employee will generally leave for a competitor offering 10% more. If you already pay 10% over market, a competitor has to reach 20% over to move them, and most will not. This does not stop everyone from leaving. It makes it expensive. This is what the firm budgets toward.
40% Payroll Ratio (The Ceiling)	Payroll should sit at roughly 40% of revenue and must not exceed it. Firms running at 65% wonder why they are not profitable. This is the hard constraint, and no pay decision in this Playbook may breach it.
$200,000 Revenue Per Employee	The companion metric to the payroll ratio. Read the two together, because either one alone can be gamed.

Employees know intuitively that moving firms means starting at the bottom of the totem pole again. For most people that is not a risk worth taking for a 10% increase, which is exactly why the premium works.

3.2 The Annual Market Assessment

Run in [COMP REVIEW MONTH], owned by [PEOPLE LEAD], approved by [APPROVER]. Placed two to three months before the raise month in Book Three so findings can be funded in the same cycle.

1. **Build the role list.** Every position in the firm, grouped so that people doing the same work are compared together.
2. **Gather market data** for each role in your industry and region. Use at least three sources: live competitor job postings with published ranges, any bar or paralegal association salary survey available to you, and recruiter or agency guidance.
3. **Set the market midpoint** for each role, then set the firm's target at that midpoint plus 10%.
4. **Compare every current employee against the target.** Flag anyone more than 10% below it.
5. **Cost the correction** and bring it to [APPROVER] with the payroll ratio impact shown.
6. **Decide and communicate.** Corrections take effect with the raise cycle unless someone is far enough below market that waiting risks losing them, in which case correct off-cycle immediately.

What Under-Market Looks Like in Practice

If you pay legal assistants $45,000 and every competitor in your market is advertising $60,000, you are not paying market and you will lose people for that reason whether or not they say so on the way out.

The assessment exists to find that gap before a competitor does. Finding it in an exit interview is finding it a year late.

3.3 Benefits

Health insurance, retirement, and paid time off are what employees expect rather than what differentiates you. Candidates in their early twenties now ask about health insurance in first interviews, which was not true a decade ago.

The differentiators are wellness programs, mental health support, flexible working hours, and schedule flexibility. Where the firm offers them, state them with real numbers and real eligibility dates in the job ad, the offer letter, and the annual benefits communication.

3.4 Reconciling the Three Rules

Market plus 10%, the 3 to 12% raise band in Book Three, and the 40% payroll ceiling can collide. The relationship between them is fixed: **market plus 10% is what the firm budgets toward, and 40% of revenue is the ceiling that budget lives under.** The target bends. The ceiling does not.

1. **The payroll ceiling wins, every time.** A firm that breaches 40% to fund pay is making layoffs within two years, and layoffs cost more people than under-market pay ever did.
2. **Market corrections come before performance raises.** Someone materially below market is a live flight risk. Someone at market who had a strong year is not.
3. **Where the ceiling binds, fund by role rather than across the board.** Correct the roles furthest below market first, and schedule the rest against a named date.
4. **If both cannot be funded, say so out loud.** Name the constraint, name the date it will be revisited, and do not let silence do the communicating.
5. **Growing revenue is the only durable answer.** The ceiling is a percentage. A firm that wants to pay more at the top of the market grows the denominator rather than arguing with the rule.

4. Career Growth and Development

People who leave because they see no path do not usually say so at the time. They say it later, in an interview with their next employer, and firms hear it about themselves only by accident.

Most employees mean money when they say growth. A smaller group understands that growing personally and professionally is how the money eventually arrives, and those are the people willing to wait their turn. Both groups need to see the ladder.

4.1 What This Section Requires

- **A published career pathway for every ladder in the firm.** Built under Book Three, Section 10. If it is not published, it does not retain anyone.
- **A mentorship and coaching program**, which is the piece most firms are missing. See Section 4.2.
- **Training hours attached to each rung**, so an employee can act on the pathway this month.
- **The one, three, and five year goals** captured at Day 90 under Book Two, revisited at every semiannual review.

4.2 Mentorship and Coaching

A firm once offered a departing associate a $25,000 raise and still lost her. Asked what would have kept her, she said the chance to be mentored and coached by a partner. The firm had no such program, and people were left to develop themselves.

That is the failure this section exists to prevent. It is tempting to hold that people should develop themselves and that their growth is not the firm's responsibility. The practical consequence of that position is that a specific group of your best people will leave, and they will leave for firms that offer something you could have provided at no cash cost.

Element	How to Run It
Pairing	Pair less experienced employees with seasoned ones who can provide guidance, support, and career advice. For attorneys, pair with a partner. The seniority of the mentor is part of what is being offered.
Cadence	Monthly at minimum, scheduled, and owned by the mentor rather than the mentee. A program that depends on the junior person chasing the senior one is not a program.
Coaching	Distinct from mentorship. Coaching refines a specific skill against a specific gap and is usually shorter and more targeted.
Coverage	All employees, with attorneys prioritized where budget forces a choice.
Review	Assessed annually. Ask mentees whether it is delivering, and replace pairings that are not working without treating it as anyone's failure.

5. Work Environment and Culture

If you expect people in the office, you are responsible for building an office worth the commute. One firm in an expensive, centrally located building, with staff commuting close to an hour, never struggled to hire, and lawyers at other firms applied to them unprompted. They had spent deliberately on making the place engaging and welcoming. Create an environment where people want to come to work and they will come to work, and the burden of creating it sits with ownership.

5.1 Fostering the Culture

- **Leadership sets the tone.** Culture is not announced. It is whatever leaders repeatedly do and repeatedly tolerate.
- **Name the values and use them.** Respect, collaboration, and inclusion are the common ones. Whatever yours are, they should appear in hiring, in onboarding, in reviews, and at the top of every meeting.
- **Invest in the physical space** if you expect people in it. This is a real budget line rather than a nice-to-have.

5.2 A Supportive Environment

Employees have to feel comfortable expressing their ideas, concerns, and needs. Open communication and real platforms for feedback are what build trust and transparency, and there is nothing worse than working for an organization that does not listen.

Listening is a system rather than a disposition. Sections 8 and 9 are that system: a survey that runs on a schedule and produces visible change, and a concerns process with an owner and a clock.

6. Leadership and Management

People do not leave firms. They leave their leaders. Exit interviews bear this out repeatedly: employees who are dissatisfied take it out on leadership, and when a department loses person after person, the departing people name the same cause.

One firm watched a single department turn over repeatedly while no other department had the same problem. Every departing employee named the department leader. The firm removed the leader and the department recovered. The lesson is not that the leader was uniquely bad. It is that the firm had the data for a long time before it acted.

6.1 The Leader Turnover Signal

Turnover is measured by department and by leader rather than only firm-wide, because the firm-wide number hides exactly the pattern you need to see.

Signal	What to Do
One department exceeds the firm turnover rate by more than half, over two consecutive quarters	[PEOPLE LEAD] reviews every exit interview from that department and reports the themes to [APPROVER].
Departing employees from one department name the same cause twice	Treat it as a finding rather than a coincidence. Two independent people naming the same leader is data.
A leader's team scores materially below the firm average on the engagement survey	A development conversation with that leader, with support attached, before any conclusion is drawn.
The pattern persists after support and a defined period	Move the leader. Keeping a leader who is costing the firm people is a decision to keep paying that cost.

Give the leader the chance to change first. Most leaders producing turnover are not malicious. They were promoted for individual excellence and never taught to manage, which is a failure of the firm rather than of the person.

6.2 Leadership Development

The firm rises and falls on leadership, and past roughly $8 million in revenue, leadership development becomes the most important investment available. Failure to invest in leadership means one of two things: not understanding that it matters, or not knowing how to get a return from it.

- **A defined curriculum** covering communication, conflict resolution, team building, and performance management.
- **A real duration.** Leadership development that fits in a single afternoon is an event rather than a program. A multi-week course is the shape that works.
- **Every leader participates**, including the ones who have been leading longest.
- **Strong leader and employee relationships** are built in the weekly one-on-one from Book Three, Section 5.3. That meeting is the mechanism, and skipping it is the most common way leadership development fails to reach the ground.

7. Recognition and Rewards

Incentives reward work that goes above and beyond the job. They do not buy the job itself, and confusing the two is expensive.

If you incentivize people to do their job, they stop doing it when the incentive stops. You already pay a base salary for the job. Reserve incentives for performance beyond it, and be careful of short-term rewards used as fixes for long-term problems, because the underlying problem outlives the bonus.

7.1 What to Recognize

Trigger	Instrument
Exceeding performance goals for the quarter	A performance bonus, sized in advance and published so people know what qualifies.
Completing a significant project ahead of schedule	A one-time bonus or additional paid time off.
Demonstrating exceptional leadership	Recognition plus an expansion of scope, which for many people is the reward that matters.
Living the firm's values visibly	Public recognition. This is the cheapest instrument here and the most underused.

7.2 Non-Monetary Recognition

Money is the least flexible recognition tool the firm has. Three practices cost almost nothing and work.

- **A recognition segment in every meeting.** Open the floor for people to name a colleague who did something worth noticing. There is nothing sweeter than being recognized publicly for what you contributed.
- **Celebrate every promotion.** Publicly, every time, without exception. A promotion nobody hears about lands as extra work rather than as advancement.
- **Praise at the same volume as you correct.** Use the same energy appraising the work as you use criticizing it. Continuous praise is also what makes critical feedback land when it comes.

7.3 Budget

Fund recognition and engagement as a line rather than an improvisation. A common benchmark is roughly $100 per employee per year, or 3 to 5% of payroll for the broader engagement budget. Set the number, name the approver, and publish what it can be spent on.

8. Engagement and Involvement

Engaged employees stay because they feel connected to the work and to where the firm is going. It is much harder to leave an organization you are fully bought into, and that emotional cost is the one thing a competitor cannot simply outbid.

One firm stayed in a networking organization for fifteen years after outgrowing it, because its people had made friends there and believed in what it was doing. Employees want purpose and belonging. Building both is the firm's job.

8.1 Involvement in Decision-Making

Bring people into brainstorming sessions, project planning, and feedback on firm policies. Leaders in particular should be involved in decisions, because they are the ones in front of clients every day.

Involvement is not the same as governing by consensus. Ownership decides the vision, the values, and the direction. Involvement means people are consulted, heard, and told what happened as a result. Firms that blur the two end up either paralyzed or resented, and sometimes both.

8.2 The Engagement Survey

Run annually in [SURVEY MONTH], owned by [PEOPLE LEAD]. Whether it is anonymous is a firm decision. What matters far more than the format is that you ask, and then that you act.

Element	The Standard
Frequency	Annual in [SURVEY MONTH], with an optional short pulse at the six-month mark. More often than that produces survey fatigue and no additional signal.
Anonymity	Decide once and state it plainly before people respond. Changing it partway destroys the trust the survey depends on.
Length	Short enough to complete in ten minutes. A long survey buys you a low response rate.
Segmentation	Report by department. The firm-wide average hides the department that is in trouble, which is the thing you most need to find.
Reporting Back	Results and the firm's response go back to everyone within thirty days. Non-negotiable.
Acting	Pick two or three things and change them visibly. Collecting feedback and doing nothing is worse than never asking, because it proves the point the disengaged people were already making.

8.3 Creating a Sense of Purpose

Employees want purpose and belonging. Purpose comes from connecting the daily work to what the firm exists to do for clients, which is why every meeting opens on vision, mission, and values. Belonging comes from relationships, which is why Book Two spends real money on lunches in the first week.

9. Addressing Concerns Promptly

This is the shortest section in the document and it may be the most important one. Every time an employee voices a concern that goes unnoticed or unanswered, that employee eventually leaves, and when asked why, they say the ownership and the leadership did not listen.

Note what that means. The concern itself is rarely what causes the departure. The silence is.

9.1 How Concerns Reach the Firm

The firm does not operate an open-door policy. An open door invites people to walk in and raise anything at any moment without an agenda, which produces unprepared conversations and constant interruption. Instead, employees book time with a stated purpose so the leader can prepare and the conversation is worth having.

That gate only works if the booking is easy and the response is fast. Four channels, published to everyone:

Channel	How It Works
The Weekly One-on-One	The default and by far the most common route. Agenda item four in Book Three exists for exactly this.
A Booked Meeting With Any Leader	Any employee may book time with any leader, including [APPROVER], with a stated purpose. Booking is never refused.
A Concern About Your Own Leader	Goes to [PEOPLE LEAD] directly, never through the person it concerns. Publish this route explicitly, because employees will not assume it exists.
The Engagement Survey	The channel for things people will not say in a room. See Section 8.2.

9.2 The Response Standard

Stage	Standard
Acknowledge	Within one business day. Acknowledgment is not resolution. It is confirmation that the concern was received and is being handled by a named person.
Respond	Within five business days, with either an answer or a date by which there will be one.
Resolve or Close	Within thirty days. Where the answer is no, say no and say why. A clear no delivered quickly costs the firm far less than an open question left hanging.
Log	[PEOPLE LEAD] keeps a concerns log: date raised, who raised it, the theme, the owner, and the closing date. Individual entries stay confidential. The themes are reported to [APPROVER] quarterly.

Proactive leadership is what keeps concerns small. Regular check-ins, monitoring workload and stress, and adding support before someone asks. If an employee is buried, redistributing the work prevents the burnout rather than treating it.

10. Measuring Retention

Five numbers, calculated by [PEOPLE LEAD], reported to [APPROVER] quarterly. Every one of them is segmented by department, because the firm-wide figure conceals the problem you are looking for.

10.1 The Retention KPIs

KPI	How to Calculate It	Target	What It Tells You
Annual Turnover Rate	Separations in the period divided by average headcount in the period, annualized. Average headcount is the start-of-period figure plus the end-of-period figure, divided by two.	Set your own baseline in year one, then improve on it	The headline. There is no universal correct number, so the trend is what matters.
Voluntary Turnover Rate	Voluntary separations divided by average headcount.	Below your total rate by a wide margin	Separated from involuntary turnover, because involuntary turnover can be a sign of a healthy standard rather than a failure.
Regretted Turnover Rate	Departures the firm would have preferred to keep, divided by average headcount.	Track and drive down	The number that hurts. Losing someone you were going to manage out is not the same event as losing your best paralegal.
First-Year Turnover	Separations within twelve months of hire divided by hires reaching twelve months.	15% or lower	Points backward at selection and onboarding rather than at retention. Feeds the Book One and Book Two KPIs.
Turnover by Department and Leader	The annual rate, calculated for each department.	No department more than 50% above the firm rate	The single most useful cut of the data, and the one that surfaces a leadership problem while it is still fixable.

10.2 The Cost of Losing Someone

Turnover costs are real and mostly invisible: recruiting, onboarding, and training the replacement, plus the disruption to the team and the productivity lost while the seat is empty and while the new person ramps. Calculate it once for a representative role so the firm is arguing from a number rather than an instinct.

Component	How to Estimate It
Cost to Recruit	Take the cost per hire from Book One for that role.
Cost to Onboard and Train	Trainer hours plus manager hours through Day 90, at loaded rates, plus the new hire's own salary for the two-week non-productive period.

Component	How to Estimate It
Lost Productivity While Vacant	Days the seat is empty multiplied by the daily revenue or capacity that seat carries.
Lost Productivity While Ramping	Assume the new hire delivers roughly half the output through Day 90.
Team Disruption	Hours other employees spend covering the gap, at loaded rates.
Total	**Run this once for one role. The figure is usually large enough to settle most arguments about retention spending.**

10.3 Diagnosing a Turnover Problem

Pattern	Where to Look First
Turnover concentrated in one department	The leader. Section 6.1.
Turnover concentrated in the first year	Selection and onboarding. Books One and Two, not this one.
Departures citing pay	Run the market assessment early. Also read Section 11.1, because pay is frequently the reason people give rather than the reason they left.
Departures citing no future here	Career pathways are missing, unpublished, or not believed. Book Three, Section 10.
Departures citing not being heard	Section 9. Check the concerns log against the exit interviews and see how many of the departing people had raised something first.
High turnover with good survey scores	The survey is not safe, is not anonymous enough, or is not asking the right questions. Believe the turnover.

11. Keeping People Before They Resign

11.1 The Stay Conversation

Exit interviews tell you why someone left. A stay conversation tells you why someone might, while there is still time to do something about it. Run one with every employee once a year, at the six-month point between reviews, so it never collides with a performance conversation or a pay decision.

Held by [MANAGER], twenty minutes, and explicitly not a review. Five questions:

ASK *"What makes you look forward to work on a good day here?"*

ASK *"What frustrates you enough that you have thought about it more than once?"*

ASK *"If you left, what would most likely be the reason?"*

ASK *"What would you want more of, and what would you want less of?"*

ASK *"Is there anything you have raised before that you feel went nowhere?"*

The last question is the one that produces the finding. Then act on at least one thing and tell them you did, because a stay conversation that changes nothing is a concern that went unanswered, and Section 9 explains where that leads.

11.2 Flight Risk

When someone leaves for more money, money is often not the reason. Something else drove the decision and the offer simply made it actionable. Managers should raise a flight risk with [PEOPLE LEAD] early rather than waiting for certainty.

- A visible change in engagement, discretionary effort, or willingness to take on new work.
- Withdrawal from the team, or from the parts of the job they used to enjoy.
- A concern raised more than once with no resolution.
- A pay position materially below the market target.
- Someone who has been in the same rung with no visible next step for an unusually long time.

11.3 Counteroffers

The firm makes counteroffers, and it makes them inside two limits. A counteroffer may not take the person above the market plus 10% target for their role, and it may not take firm payroll above 40% of revenue. Within those two ceilings, [APPROVER] approves in writing. Above either one, the answer is no.

Losing a good employee you could have kept inside your own budget is a worse outcome than matching an offer. What the ceilings prevent is the other failure, where a resignation becomes the fastest route to a raise and everyone watching learns it.

Situation	Response
Below the market target	Correct the pay to the target. Say plainly that it is a correction the firm owed rather than a counteroffer, and make it whether or not they stay. Then ask why the annual market assessment did not catch it.
At or near the target, and the outside offer sits inside both ceilings	Counteroffer permitted. [APPROVER] approves in writing, with the new figure and the reason recorded in the file.

Situation	Response
The outside offer is above market plus 10% for the role	Decline to match. Tell them plainly that the firm pays to the top of the market rather than above it, and wish them well. Start the offboarding in Section 13.
Payroll is already at or near 40% of revenue	No counteroffer at any level until the ratio is back under the ceiling. This is a solvency constraint rather than a judgment about the person, and it should be said that way.
The person is genuinely irreplaceable in the next ninety days	Any exception above either ceiling is approved by [APPROVER] in writing, with the reason recorded. Treat it as a business continuity decision rather than a retention decision, and fix the single point of failure it just exposed.

A Counteroffer Accepted Is Not a Problem Solved

When someone leaves for more money, money is often not the reason. Something else drove the decision and the offer only made it actionable. A matched salary with the underlying reason untouched buys you nine months.

Within thirty days of any accepted counteroffer, [MANAGER] and [PEOPLE LEAD] hold a stay conversation under Section 11.1, identify the non-pay reason the person was looking, and act on at least one thing. Record it in the file alongside the approval.

12. Separations

Every separation is either voluntary or involuntary, and the two run differently up to the point of the last day. After that the offboarding in Section 13 is identical.

12.1 Voluntary Separations

1. **Accept graciously, the same day.** How a firm treats someone on the way out is observed closely by everyone staying.
2. **Notify [PEOPLE LEAD] and [APPROVER] immediately**, before the news travels informally.
3. **Agree the last day and the notice period** in writing.
4. **Plan the transition.** Matters, clients, files, passwords, and anything that lives only in this person's head. Start on day one of the notice period rather than in the final week.
5. **Announce it** in a way the departing person has seen and agreed to.
6. **Hold the exit interview** under Section 12.3.

12.2 Involuntary Separations

Before any involuntary separation, confirm every one of the following. Any gap is a reason to pause rather than proceed.

1. The expectations were written down and the employee saw them.
2. The performance conversations happened and were documented at the time.
3. The second look at the subjective assessment was completed by someone other than the manager, as Book Three requires.
4. Redeployment was genuinely considered, because someone failing in one seat is frequently right for another.
5. An improvement plan was offered and the decision date has passed, unless the conduct was of a kind that makes a plan inappropriate.
6. [APPROVER] has approved, and employment counsel has been consulted.

Why the Documentation Matters

A firm that terminated an employee for repeated values violations and underperformance was met with a bar complaint and a lawsuit for roughly $100,000. When it went looking for the performance record, the department leader had never written anything down.

The rule that came out of it is the one this Playbook carries throughout: every conversation requires documentation, filed at the time. Leaders are often reluctant to put their assessments in writing. The written record protects the leader and the employee both, and its absence protects nobody.

12.3 Exit Interviews

Held for every departure, voluntary and involuntary. Conducted by [PEOPLE LEAD] rather than the departing person's manager, because the manager is frequently the subject. Scheduled in the final week, thirty minutes, and never on the last day when the person has already left emotionally.

Question	What You Are Listening For
What made you start looking?	The trigger, which is rarely the same as the reason given for accepting.
What made you accept the other offer?	What they are getting that you did not provide.
How would you describe working for your leader?	Ask it directly. This is the single highest-value question here and most exit interviews avoid it.
Did you feel heard when you raised something?	Cross-check the answer against the concerns log.
Was there a point where we could have kept you?	Almost always yes, and almost always earlier than the firm assumes.
What would you change about your first ninety days?	Departing employees name onboarding years later. Ask while they are in the room.
Would you work here again, and would you recommend us?	The summary judgment. Note any hesitation before the answer.

Individual responses stay confidential. Themes are aggregated and reported to [APPROVER] quarterly alongside the turnover numbers. An exit interview that is filed and never read is a half hour spent making someone feel heard on their way out of the door, which is not nothing, and is not the point.

13. Offboarding

Run for every departure regardless of cause, owned by [PEOPLE LEAD]. The checklist is Appendix D.

Area	What Happens
Client and Matter Transition	Reassign every matter in writing, with the client notified where the relationship or the rules require it. For licensed roles, confirm the ethical obligations on file transfer with counsel.
Knowledge Transfer	A written handover of anything that exists only in this person's head: passwords, vendor relationships, undocumented processes, and the matters where they are the only person who knows the history.
Systems and Access	Deprovision on the last day, at a defined hour, not before and not a week later. Email, case management, document platform, phone, banking, and any third-party account.
Property	Equipment, keys, badges, credit cards, and files returned and logged.
Final Pay and Benefits	Final pay handled per your state's rules, which frequently set a hard deadline. Accrued paid time off treated per state law and your policy. Benefits continuation notices issued on time.
Records	Personnel file closed and retained per the schedule in Book One. Medical and accommodation records stay in the separate confidential file.
References	One published policy applied to everyone, and one named person who gives references. Inconsistent reference practice is how firms create claims.
Announcement	Told to the team directly rather than allowed to leak, and told before clients hear it.

13.1 Alumni and Rehiring

A good leaver is a future hire, a future referral source, and a future client. Keep a list, and keep in touch with the ones you would take back.

- **Mark every departure as eligible or not eligible for rehire**, with the reason, at the time. Deciding this two years later produces inconsistency and argument.
- **Add good leavers to the bench list** in Book One. Someone who already knows the systems and the culture is the cheapest strong hire available to you.
- **A returning employee re-onboards.** Shortened, but not skipped. Enough has changed, and their memory of how things work is a year out of date.

14. Appendices

Appendix A: Annual Market Assessment

Assessment Year	
Completed By and Date	
Approved By and Date	

Role	Market Midpoint	Target (Midpoint +10%)	Current Average	Gap and Action

Sources used

Total cost of corrections, and payroll ratio after

Appendix B: Stay Conversation Record

Employee and Role	
Manager and Date	

Question	What They Said
What makes you look forward to work on a good day?	
What frustrates you more than once?	
If you left, what would the reason most	

Question	What They Said
likely be?	
More of, and less of?	
Anything you raised before that went nowhere?	

The one thing we will change, and by when

Appendix C: Exit Interview Form

Employee and Role	
Tenure	
Voluntary or Involuntary	
Interviewer and Date	
Destination Firm and Role, If Shared	

Question	Response
What made you start looking?	
What made you accept the other offer?	
How would you describe working for your leader?	
Did you feel heard when you raised something?	
Was there a point where we could have kept you?	
What would you change about your first ninety days?	
Would you work here again? Would you recommend us?	

Eligible for rehire: Yes / No. **Reason:** ________________________________

Themes to report to [APPROVER] this quarter

Appendix D: Offboarding Checklist

Employee and Role	
Last Day	
Owner	

Item	Done	Date
Resignation or decision documented in the file		
[PEOPLE LEAD] and [APPROVER] notified		
Last day and notice period agreed in writing		
Matters reassigned in writing		
Clients notified where required		
Written knowledge handover completed		
Team announcement made		
Exit interview held		
Systems access deprovisioned on the last day		
Equipment, keys, badge, and cards returned		
Final pay processed per state deadline		
Accrued paid time off handled per policy and state law		
Benefits continuation notices issued		
Personnel file closed and retained		
Rehire eligibility recorded		
Added to the alumni list if eligible		

Appendix E: Concerns Log

Held by [PEOPLE LEAD]. Individual entries confidential. Themes reported quarterly.

Date Raised	Raised By	Theme	Owner	Closed On

Appendix F: Quarterly Retention Report

Quarter	
Prepared By and Date	

Metric	This Quarter	Prior Quarter	Trend
Annual turnover rate			
Voluntary turnover rate			
Regretted turnover rate			
First-year turnover			
Highest department turnover, and which			
Concerns raised, and concerns closed			
Stay conversations held			

Exit interview themes this quarter

The one retention action we are taking next quarter, and who owns it

Document Control

Owner: [PEOPLE LEAD] · Approver: [APPROVER] · Version: 1.0 · Effective: ____________ · Next review: ____________

Review annually. The quarterly retention report in Appendix F is what feeds the revisions.

The People Playbook: Book One Recruiting and Hiring · Book Two Onboarding · Book Three Developing · **Book Four Retaining**.