

DVR STAY INTERVIEW PROJECT REPORT

2018

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DVR Stay Interview Project Report

Purpose

In 2016, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) experienced 14.3% staff turnover. In 2017, that figure increased to 20.8%. In addition, 22% of DVR employees are age 55 or older, with 9.5% of DVR employees currently eligible for retirement. These indicators could result in a significant reduction of skilled staff leaving DVR operations in a challenging position. Employee retention is a challenge for nearly every organization, and the cost of recruiting and training employees continues to grow. Strategically, DVR came to the conclusion that they need to better understand why current staff stay with DVR and then plan ahead to support those reasons.

In the spring of 2018, DVR piloted a Stay Interview project with employees to learn, from the employees' perspectives, why employees choose to remain employed within DVR. The ultimate goal in gathering this information is to assist with employee retention, cultivate relationships with current staff, and use the findings for employee recruitment. DVR currently delivers a formal Exit Survey with any employee that leaves DVR. The Stay Interview is a complement to those survey results and proposes to augment what has already been learned through those efforts.

Process

With support from DVR's Senior Leadership Team, DVR staff worked with Bureau of Enterprise Solutions staff to design the interview questions and develop a tool to collect the interview responses. As a first step, hiring managers and supervisors were trained on the Stay Interview process. Shortly thereafter Division Administrator Delora Newton sent an email to all DVR staff to inform them of the Stay Interview pilot and to invite them to participate.

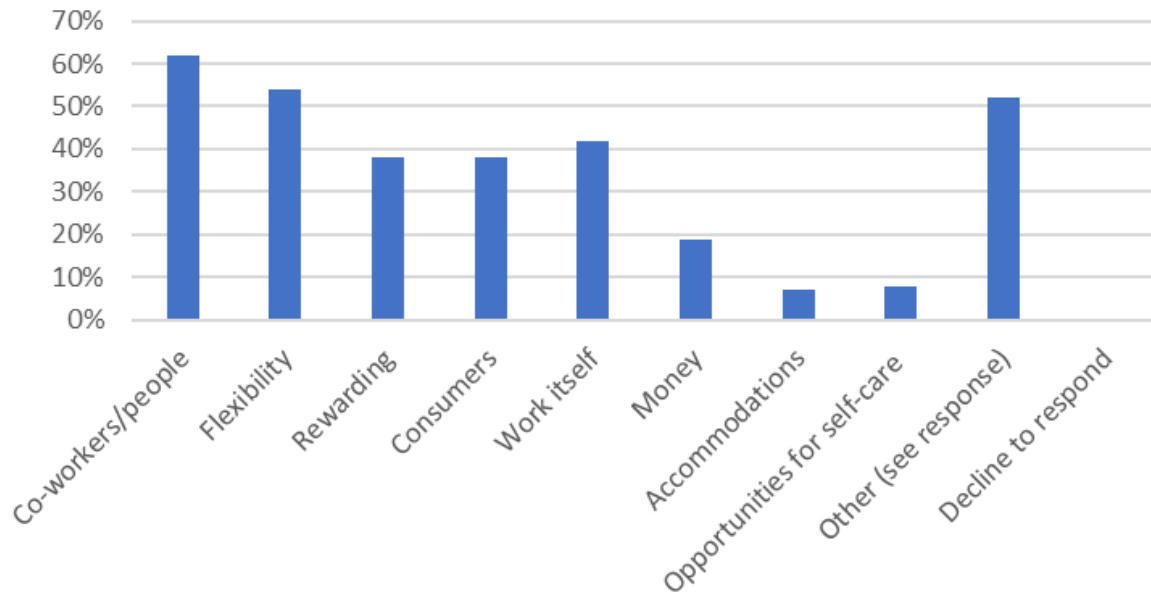
Interviews were conducted by each employee's direct supervisor. Supervisors were given three months to conduct face-to-face interviews with their staff. Employees were informed that their confidential responses would be collected via SurveyMonkey, would not be shared with colleagues, and would in no way impact their performance evaluations. Employee participation in the Stay Interview project was voluntary: 297 of 329 full-time DVR staff participated.

Interview Results

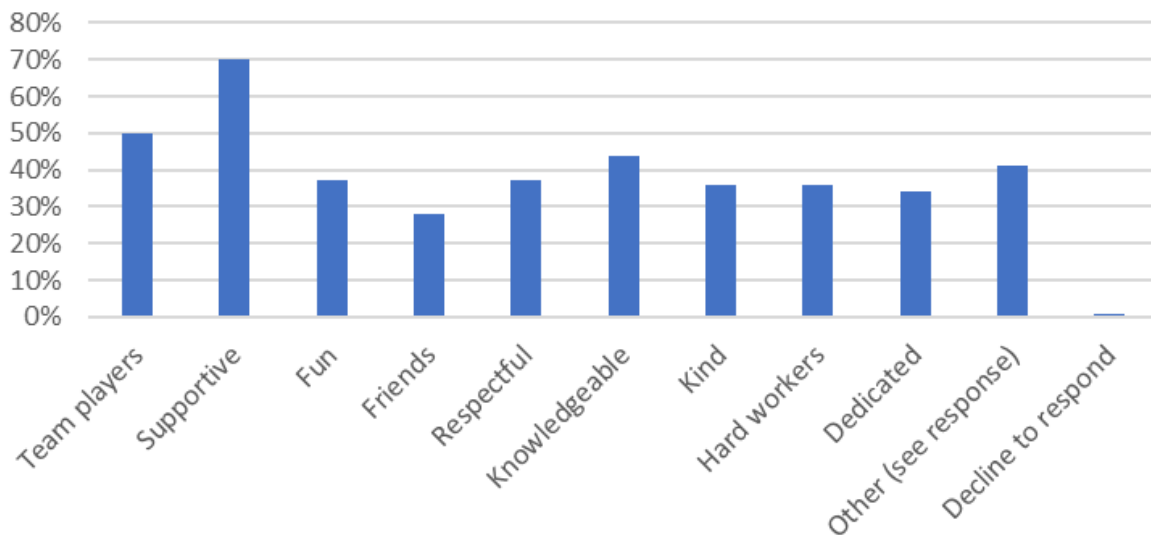
Employees were asked a combination of yes/no and open-ended questions. Q1 – Q4 captured demographics. The results are not displayed in this report to preserve participant confidentiality.

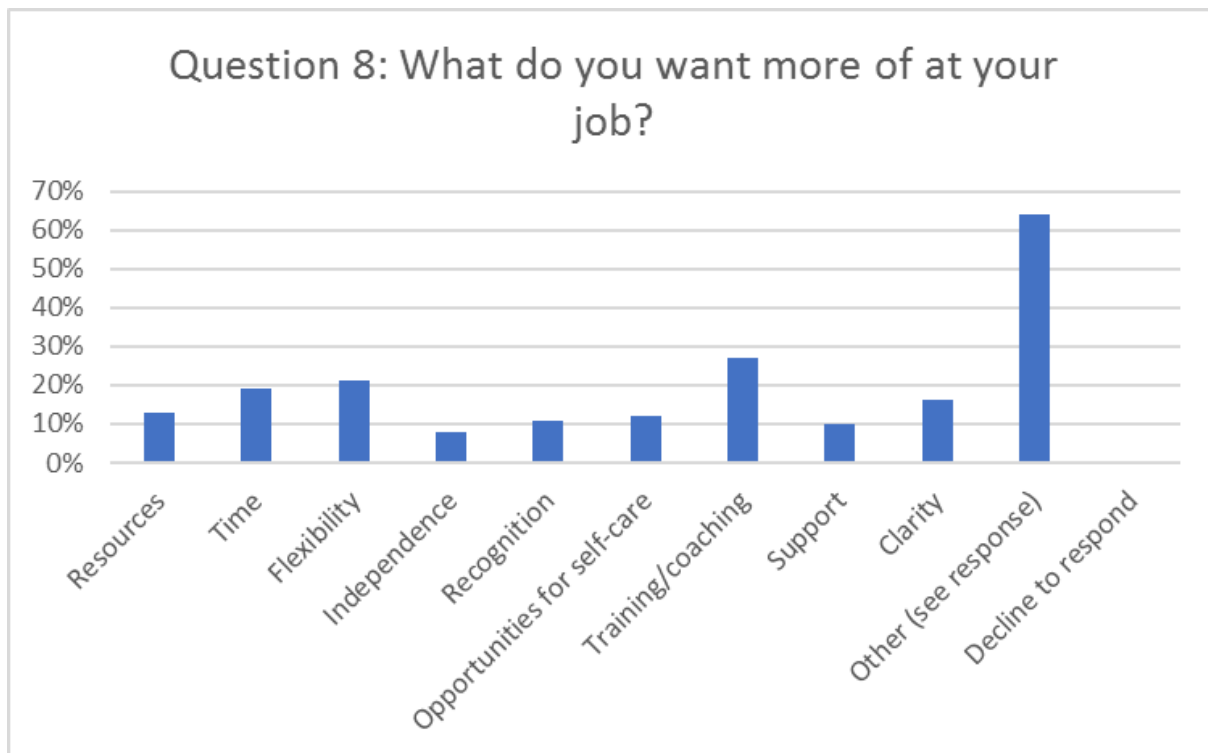
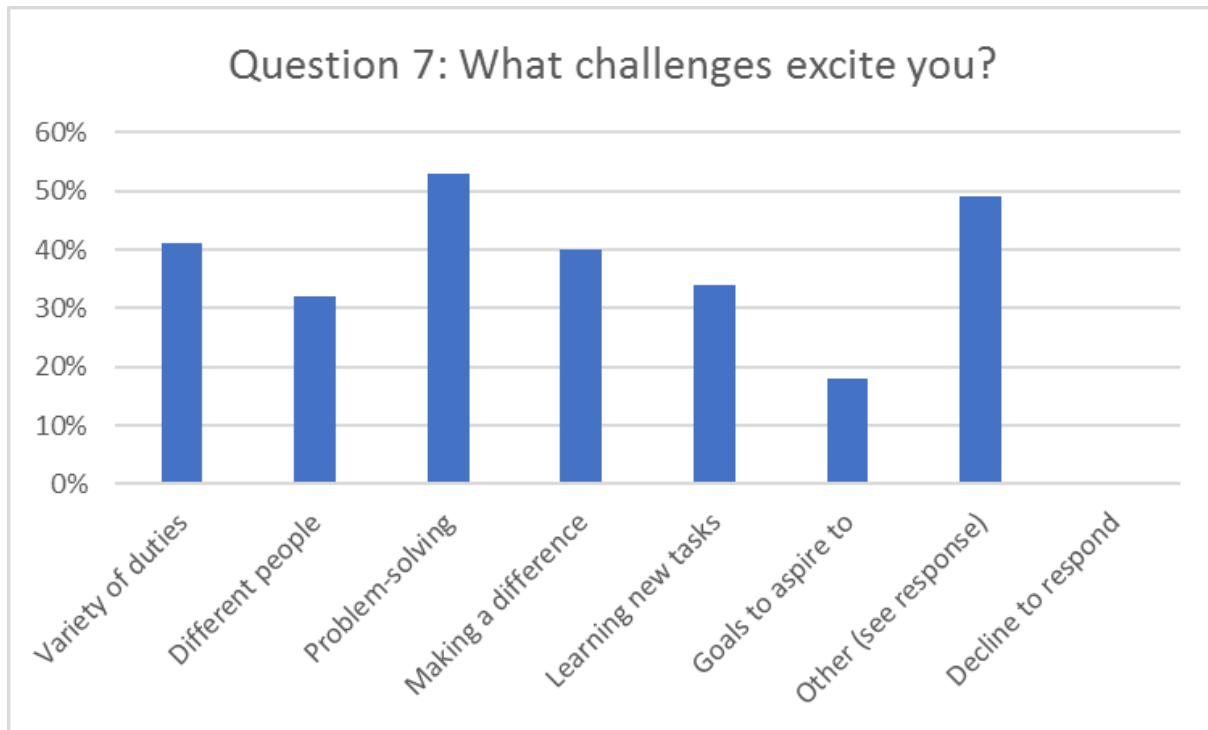
A more detailed summary and analysis of findings for open-ended Q5 – Q8 and Q14 – Q16 follows this section.

Question 5: What keeps you working here?

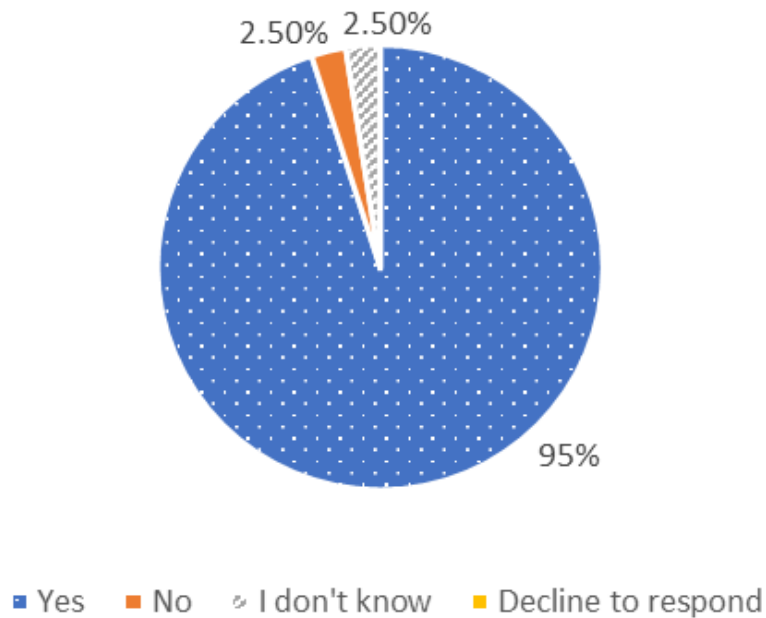


Question 6: What do you like best about the people you work with?

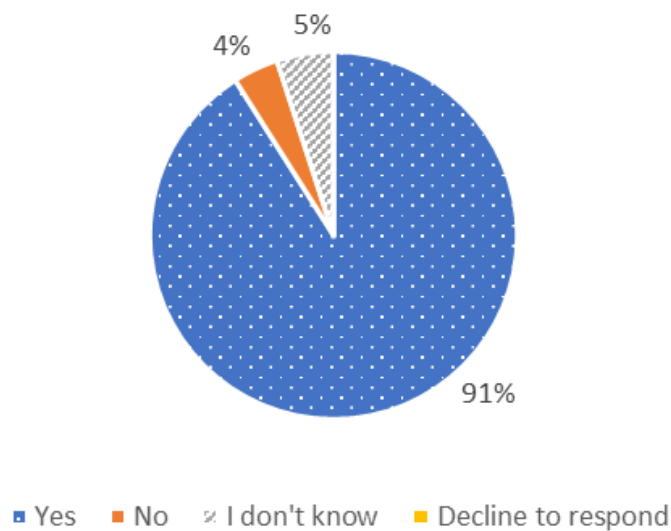




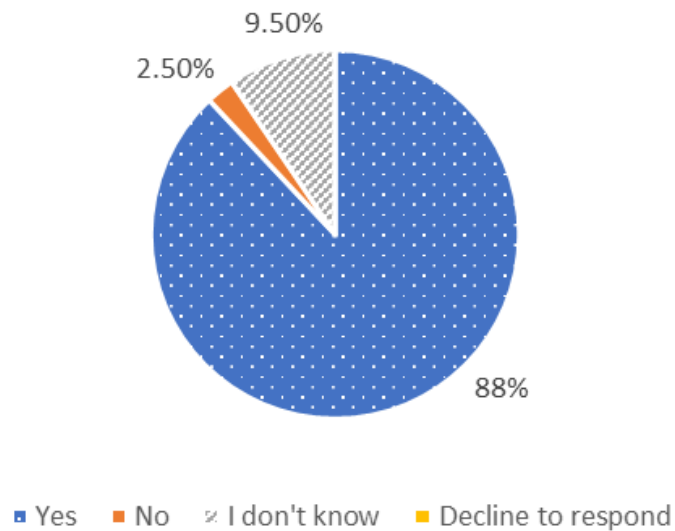
Question 9: Overall, do you feel the people you work with listen to you?



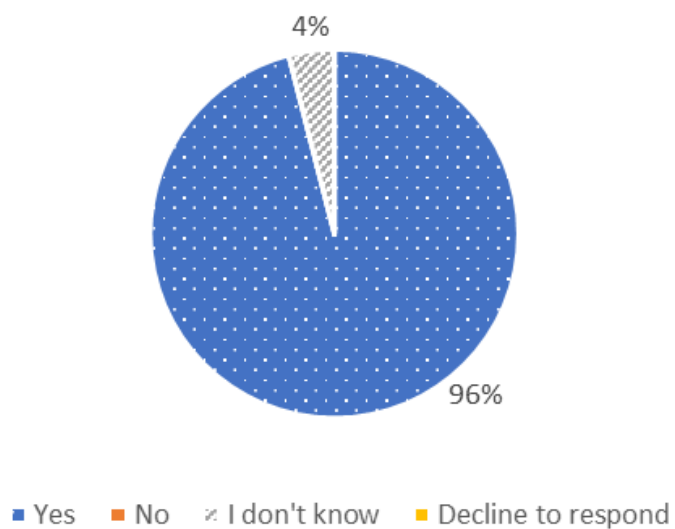
Question 10: Overall, do you feel the people you work with value your ideas/decisions?



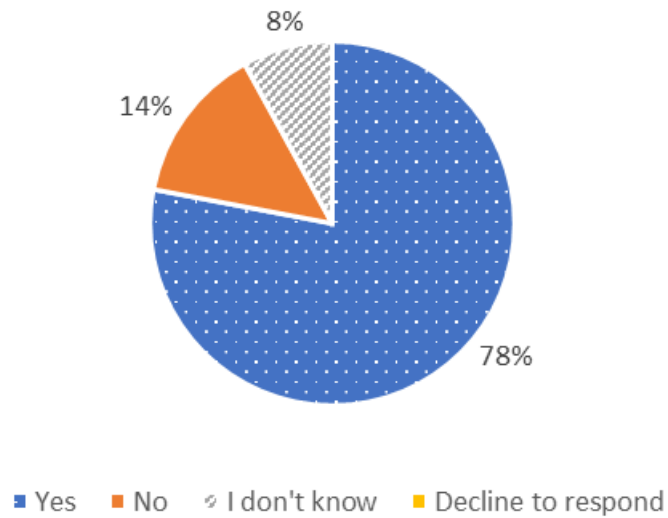
Question 11: Do you believe people think you make a difference?



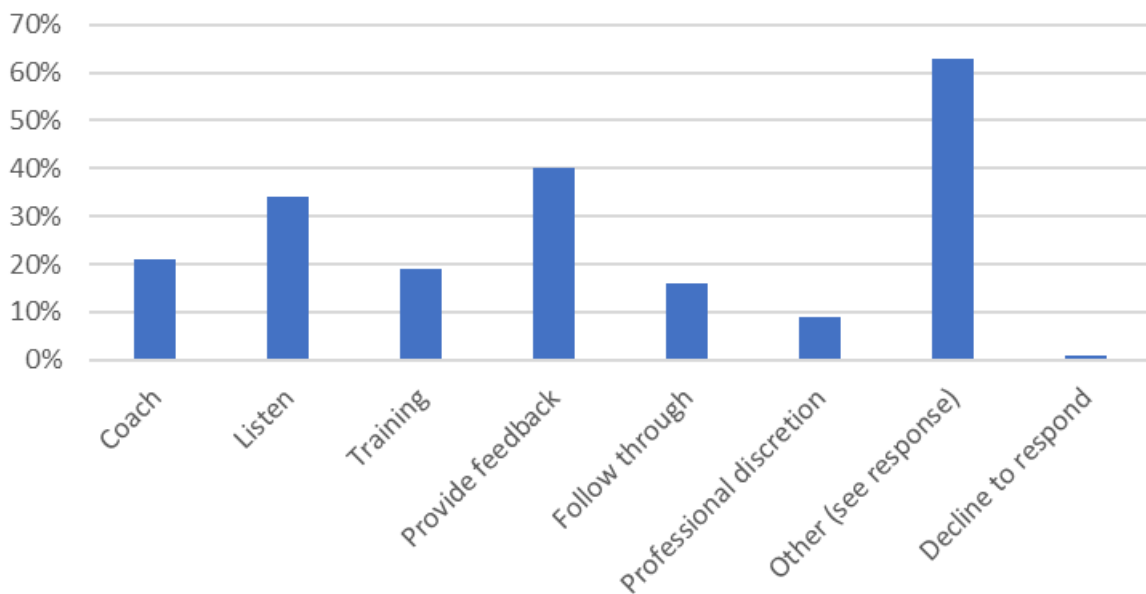
Question 12: Do you believe you make a difference?



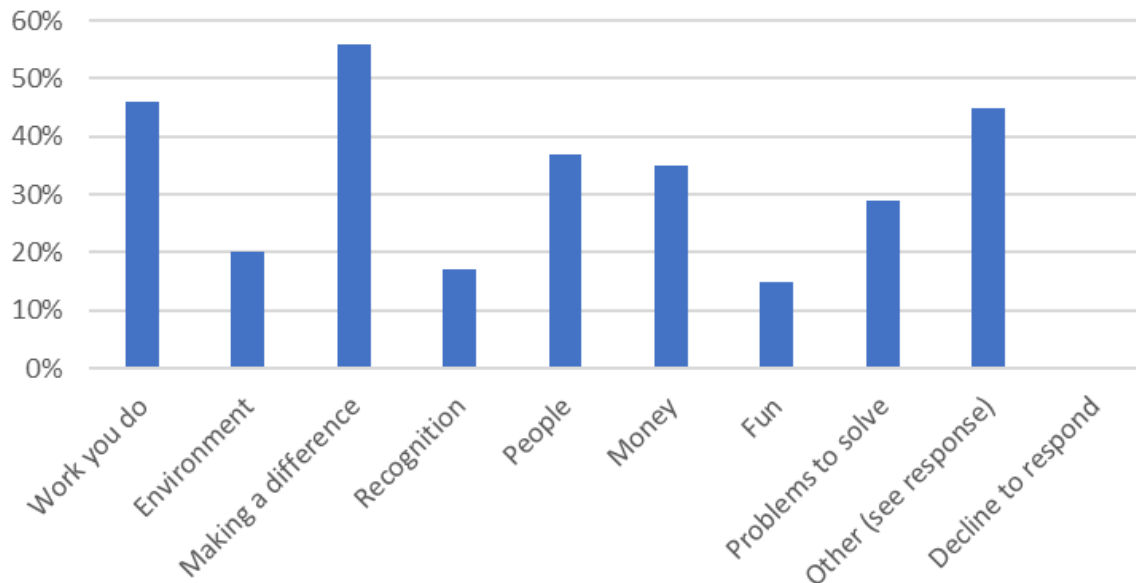
Question 13: Do you get all the information you need to do your job?



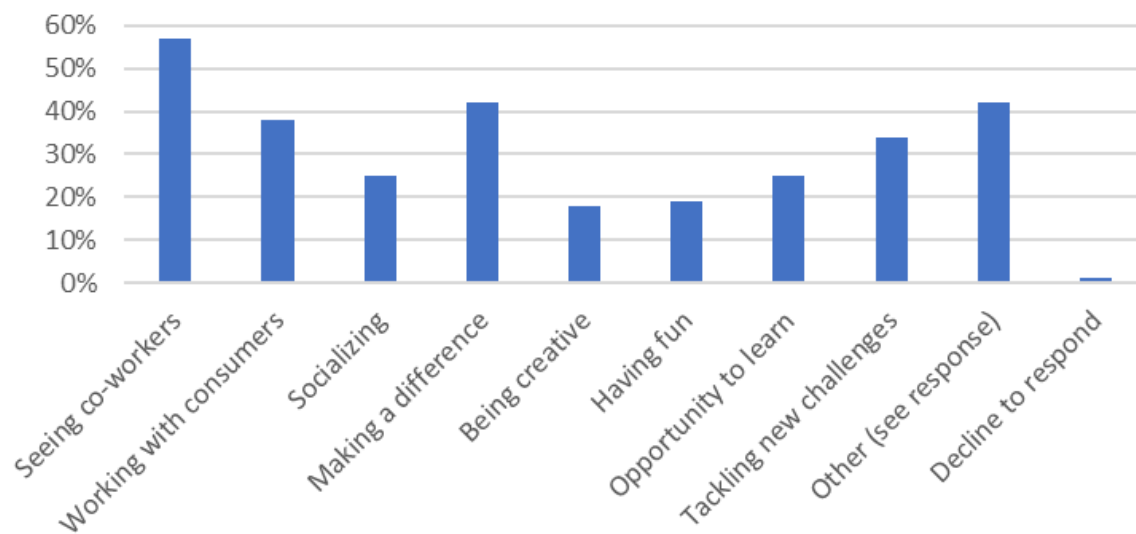
Question 14: What can I do to best support you?



Question 15: What motivates you?



Question 16: What do you look forward to when you come to work each day?



Summary of Findings

Interviewers had several categories to identify why interviewees stay employed with DVR.

Interviewers also captured interviewee responses in a comment box. The narrative below is a high-level summary for comments in Q5 – Q8 and Q14 – Q16.

Q5: What keeps you working here?

- 62% selected co-workers and people
- 54% selected flexibility
- 37.9% selected consumers
- 52% selected other

The comments, for the most part, tied directly to the themes that had already been selected. Staff expressed very strong, positive feelings about their co-workers. The majority find the flexibility very important, but also noted autonomy in the comments. This was an important factor in the way they worked, when they worked, their pace, and how they made decisions and interacted with consumers.

The staff are behind the DVR mission and a challenging work environment is a benefit. The staff like the ability to influence change. The majority expressed happiness with the work that they do and the experience of helping consumers achieve their individual employment outcomes.

The one category that was not included was benefits. About 25% of the comments included an appreciation of the benefits – the ability to gain their license, student loan forgiveness, health insurance and vacation time.

Q6: What do you like best about the people you work with?

- 70% selected supportive
- 50% selected team players
- 43% selected knowledgeable
- 41% selected other

Similar to the responses in Q5, the comments tied directly to the themes selected. It seems that the comments focus on team dynamics more so than individual working relationships. In addition to strong team dynamics and knowledgeable co-workers, interviewees defined their working relationships as extremely supportive. The staff respect one another and feel genuinely valued by both co-workers and supervisors.

The comments centered on a few key words or phrases – co-workers as friends, positive work environment, appropriate fun/humor, and a strong willingness to help each other. The comments were overwhelmingly positive about staff interactions with both co-workers and supervisors. In addition, staff are behind the mission and have an honest desire to help consumers. This shared commitment to the mission further drives the positive team relationships.

Q7: What challenges excite you?

- 52% selected problem solving
- 40% indicated it was the variety of duties
- 40% selected making a difference
- 50% selected other

The comments, for the most part, tied directly to the themes that had already been selected. Staff repeatedly referred to Project SEARCH as an exciting challenge. Other exciting challenges were tackling difficult cases, helping people with complex problems, and change itself. Autonomy was a recurring theme when respondents reflected on what they like about their work. They reported feeling supported and independent enough to explore creative solutions to complex problems.

Q8: What do you want more of at your job?

- 28% selected training/coaching
- 20% selected flexibility
- 19% selected time
- 41% selected other

Similarly to the responses in Q7, the comments tied directly to the themes selected. The responses focused heavily on training, especially in the areas of teaming, purchasing, and processing travel expenses. There was also mention of the need for a training budget for CEUs for counselors.

The strongest themes were the desire for higher pay and more communication from their Senior Leadership Team. Another frequent theme was the desire to spend more time on counseling and less time on case management duties. They would also like more wellness opportunities in their specific field offices. The ability to grow and advance their careers was also cited as something the respondents appreciate.

Q14: What can I do to best support you?

- 40% selected provide feedback
- 34% selected listen
- 21% selected coach
- 63% selected other

Many of the comments elaborated on the themes that had been selected. Those who indicated they need supervisors to provide feedback stressed the importance of *timely* feedback. Some expressed feeling well-supported by their supervisors, but many feel management should be more present and available. Employees would like to have more access to their supervisors for face-to-face consultation and feedback; this was especially noted by employees whose supervisors work in a different office in the WDA. They express that this helps them make decisions in difficult cases and ensures supervisors have first-hand knowledge of issues in the office and understand the work their employees do.

The staff want to know that supervisors support them by advocating for staff, including supervisors supporting staff decisions. Many comments also indicated employees want more transparency and open dialogue with the Senior Leadership Team. Staff like the ability to influence change.

The one category that was not included was regular one-on-one touch-bases. Many comments included an appreciation for regular meetings or a desire to meet regularly. This reinforces the aforementioned theme of present and available management. 29% of comments encompassed touch-bases, management presence, and/or management availability.

Q15: What motivates you?

- 56% selected making a difference
- 46% selected work you do
- 37% selected people
- 45% selected other

The comments overwhelmingly supported the notion that DVR employees are connected to the mission. Some of those who indicated they are motivated by people said they like meeting their consumers, and some said they enjoy working with their teams, but in both cases, positivity and success were themes often seen in the comments. Many shared they are motivated by goals and visualizations of progress. Some also mentioned being motivated by treats and celebrations of successes.

Staff appreciate professional development and training opportunities, but some expressed they would be more motivated at work if there were more opportunities for advancement. Many comments also indicated employees like to be able to use their skills at work, such as counseling skills or a talent for collaboration with partner agencies.

Though money was a pre-determined category, comments also included mentions of benefits, being able to support family, and work/life balance.

Q16: What do you look forward to when you come to work each day?

- 57% selected seeing co-workers
- 42% selected making a difference
- 38% selected working with consumers
- 42% selected other

Many of the comments mirrored themes that were shared in Q15: visualizations of progress, success, celebrations of achievements, and positivity. Employees like working with their teams and enjoy celebrating together with treats. Some comments mentioned looking forward to starting the day with coffee or consults over coffee. Again, the comments show that DVR employees are connected to the mission.

New themes that emerged in Q16 include an appreciation for variety in tasks, local wellness initiatives, and opportunities to mentor other staff. For the most part, employees are proud of their teams and feel they are good friends with their co-workers; they look forward to team-building activities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are organized by question and further divided into recommendations for **retention** and **recruitment**.

Q5: What keeps you working here?

For future recruitment purposes, include employment value of:

- Flexible work schedules/autonomy in work environment
- Being a driver for change, influencing the lives of people with disabilities statewide
- Benefits include student loan forgiveness, etc.

For retention of current employees:

- Continue to celebrate and announce the positive consumer outcomes that DVR staff delivers
- Continue to support flexible schedules and autonomy in determining when they work when possible

Q6: What do you like best about the people you work with?

For future recruitment strategies:

- Collect testimonial from staff on the positive work environment, positive working relationships and the success of the team structure DVR supports
- Share that testimonial on the DVR webpages or in recruitment materials

For retention of current employees:

- Share the wealth! Invite DVR teams to share their relationship-building expertise with other divisions. Highlight the amazing work that they do
- Deliver formal training or brown bag on best practices for team development
- Publish a bulletin article on exceptional collaboration and support within DVR teams
- Develop a list of guiding principles for team development that other divisions can use
 - If a less positive environment existed in the past, the strategies that resulted in the current environment should be captured
- Share the guiding principles with new supervisors and new employees

Q7: What challenges excite you?

For future recruitment purposes, include employment value of:

- Independence and autonomy
- Empowerment to seek creative problem-solving
- Variety of job duties
- Helping people

For retention of current employees:

- Ensure those who are interested have an opportunity to work on projects such as PROJECT SEARCH
- Continue to offer resources and encourage creativity in problem solving (especially with difficult cases)

Q8: What do you want more of at your job?

For future recruitment purposes, include employment value of:

- Training. DVR provides extensive training on counseling related topics
- Management support
- Flexibility and autonomy in the workplace

For retention of current employees:

- Increase training and communication, continue supporting flexibility and autonomy in the workplace. Explore ways to increase opportunities to for career growth
- Deliver informal, small-group training for tasks such as travel reimbursements and procurement
- Develop additional communication methods from SLT to field offices (a blog, newsletter, etc.)
- Continue the workforce planning that has begun to reach the goal of freeing counselors up to engage in more counseling activities and less case management

Q14: What can I do to best support you?

For future recruitment purposes, include employment value of:

- Being a driver for change, influencing the lives of people with disabilities statewide

For retention of current employees, encourage supervisors to maintain or increase their presence and availability:

- Schedule regular one-on-one touch-bases with staff who want to meet regularly
- Hold "office hours" – time set aside for drop-in consultations and conversations with staff
- When possible, divide office time among locations to maintain presence throughout the WDA and to avoid the appearance of favoritism toward employees in one office over another

Q15: What motivates you?

For future recruitment purposes, include employment value of:

- Healthy work/life balance
- Making a difference for job-seekers with disabilities
- Variety of trainings available to DVR staff for professional development

For retention of current employees, encourage supervisors to:

- Set achievable goals and celebrate when those goals are achieved
- Help staff find professional development and training opportunities
- Talk to staff about their career goals and find opportunities for them to use specific skills

Q16: What do you look forward to when you come to work each day?

For future recruitment purposes, include employment value of

- Local wellness initiatives
- Working with a dedicated, supportive team

For retention of current employees, encourage supervisors to

- Recognize successes however the employee prefers to receive recognition (publicly, privately, occasionally with treats)
- Host team-building activities for staff
- Allow employees to set aside a regular time for team consulting on difficult cases

Lessons Learned

DVR chose the interview format to better connect with employees and to make an investment of time and effort in DVR employees. Overall, DVR found this process valuable. Some staff expressed appreciation for the opportunity to discuss the conditions of their employment at DVR with their supervisors. Many supervisors enjoyed the process and saw the value in carving out time to hear their employees' perspectives, but some believed employees did not express their honest opinions as they may have if the interviewer had not been their direct supervisor.

Supervisors expressed that the Stay Interview project could have been improved by more training on the process before starting interviews; not all supervisors felt equipped to answer employees' questions about the Stay Interview process. Some employees felt certain questions were tailored toward a specific position type and did not feel questions were designed with their position in mind.

Suggestions for future iterations of the Stay Interview project include:

- Moving the demographic questions to the end of the interview
- Provide more training on the Stay Interview process to supervisors/interviewers
- Maintain transparency by encouraging the supervisor to show the employee how the responses were captured before submittal
- Provide clarity on who will have access to Stay Interview results to assuage employee concerns about confidentiality
- Pair the Stay Interviews with a Stay Survey to evaluate the truthfulness of in-person responses