
The Proper Way to Resign

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Congratulations. You've accepted a new job.

Now take a deep breath and prepare yourself for the challenge ahead. Even though you may be floating on cloud nine now, there are a lot of emotional and logistical hurdles yet to clear. As you've already learned, the job-changing process arouses all sorts of feelings. During the transitional phase that begins with your acceptance of an offer and ends a month or two after you've started your new position, the emotional limbo you'll experience will be especially acute. Why? Because suddenly, the reality kicks in. After all this time, the changes you've been contemplating are actually going to happen.

Not only fear of cheating on your employer, but what about letting down your co-workers or subordinates? There is an emotional/personal bond people develop that really affects moving away from the company because emotionally they are attached to the PEOPLE! They may think that they are attached to the company, but reality is that they are attached to the human beings that for years they have been spending more "waking hours" with than even their spouses! This is a very tough emotional hurdle as human beings interpersonal relationships are at the core of their existence.

This jolting realization will be followed by a sense of guilt. *Oh, my God, you tell yourself. I've been cheating on my present employer. Having an affair is one thing -- but divorce? I never knew it would come to this!* Then the fear of reprisal begins. *My boss is gonna kill me, I just know it. He's really gonna make me suffer.* And if the fear of guilt and reprisal don't give you enough to worry about, consider the buyer's remorse you'll probably feel. *What if I made a mistake? you ask yourself. I'm gonna ruin my life. Aaaauggghhh!*

Don't Let the Demons Get You Down:

Relax. Everyone who changes jobs is plagued by these demons, to a greater or lesser degree. It's only natural.

But rather than dwell on the past, imagine for a moment that you're in your new job.

Isn't this great? Think of all the changes you're making, and how your new life is a huge improvement compared to what you had before. Think of the new people you're meeting, the new skills you're acquiring, and the new opportunities you have to advance your career.

Now, are you going to let your fears unravel everything you've accomplished in the way of self-evaluation, planning, resume writing, interviewing, and putting a deal together? No way. You're not the type of person who's going to allow cold feet to put the chill on changing jobs. You're a person of action, and you seize the moment. You know that those who back away from golden opportunities may never get another chance.

Self-affirmations like these can do wonders for maintaining your positive energy and high self-esteem. And by projecting all the beneficial aspects of your new job into the present tense, you'll ward off the demons that can distort your judgment, and make you vulnerable to a counteroffer attempt.

Considering the Counteroffer:

Of course, if your motivation for getting a job offer was to position yourself for a counteroffer, then you're in the catbird's seat -- you can't lose either way.

Or can you? Some employment experts point out that accepting a counteroffer is the equivalent of career suicide.

According to Paul Hawkinson, publisher of *The Fordyce Letter*, your acceptance of a counteroffer could very well blow up in your face.

Here's how. Let's say you announce your plans to leave your current job. This, in effect, blackmails your boss, who makes you a counteroffer only to keep you until he can find your replacement, at which point you're dropped like a hot potato. In the meantime, the trusting relationship you've enjoyed with your current supervisors and peers abruptly ends, and your loyalty becomes forever suspect.

Also, if a counter offer is used to play one side against the other (existing employer vs. recruiting employer), this can be a lose/lose. The process becomes an "auction" not an exercise to find a great new opportunity for career enrichment. Both sides have to really question the character of the recruit.

Is this sort of scenario accurate? I guess it depends. My experience has been mixed. That is, some of the candidates I've known who've accepted

counteroffers have remained at their old jobs for years, and have smoothed over whatever difficulties caused their split in the first place.

It's precisely for this reason that I'm so cautious when I work with currently employed job seekers. I want to feel confident that their motives are pure before we both invest a lot of time and energy in testing the market.

However, there's a lot of evidence to support the theory that candidates who accept counteroffers become damaged goods once they've been herded back into the fold.

Here Come the Three Stages:

If your intention to make a change is sincere, and a counteroffer by your current company won't change your decision to leave, you should still keep up your guard. A counteroffer attempt can be potentially devastating, both on a personal and professional level. Unless you know how to diffuse your current employer's retaliation against your resignation, you may end up psychologically wounded, or right back at the job you wanted to leave.

The best way to shield yourself from the inevitable mixture of emotions surrounding the act of submitting your resignation is to remember that employers follow a predictable, three-stage pattern when faced with a resignation:

[1] They'll be in shock. "You sure picked a fine time to leave! Who's going to finish the project we started?"

The implication is that you're irreplaceable. They might as well ask, "How will we ever get the work done without you?"

To answer this assertion, you can reply, "If I were run over by a truck on my way to work tomorrow, I feel that somehow, this company would survive."

[2] They'll start to probe. "Who's the new company? What sort of position did you accept? What are they paying you?"

Here you must be careful not to disclose too much information, or appear too enthusiastic. Otherwise, you run the risk of feeding your current employer with ammunition he can use against you later, such as, "I've heard some pretty terrible things about your new company" or, "They'll make everything look great until you actually get there. Then you'll see what a sweat shop that place really is."

[3] They'll make you an offer to try and keep you from leaving. "You know that raise you and I were talking about a few months back? I forgot to tell you: We were just getting it processed yesterday."

To this you can respond, "Gee, today you seem pretty concerned about my happiness and well-being. Where were you yesterday, before I announced my intention to resign?"

It may take several days for the three stages to run their course, but believe me, sooner or later, you'll find yourself engaged in conversations similar to these. More than once, candidates have called me after they've resigned, to tell me that their old company followed the three-stage pattern exactly as I described it. Not only were they prepared to diffuse the counteroffer attempt, they found the whole sequence to be almost comical in its predictability.

How to Tactfully Resign:

The first thing you need to consider is the timing of your resignation. Since two weeks' notice is considered the norm, make sure your resignation properly coincides with your start date at the new company.

You should always try to avoid an extended start date. Even if your new job begins in 10 weeks, don't give 10 weeks' notice; wait eight weeks and then give two weeks' notice. This way, you'll protect yourself from disaster, in the unlikely event your new company announces a hiring freeze a month before you come on board.

And by staying at your old job for only two weeks after you've announced your resignation, you won't be subjected to the envy, scorn, or feelings of professional impotence that may result from your new role as a lame-duck employee.

Some companies will make your exit plans for you. I placed a candidate once whose employer had the security guard escort him out of the building the moment he announced his intention to go to work for a direct competitor. Fortunately, he was still given two weeks' pay.

You should suggest to make an announcement to people you work with. This should help you avert rumors and make the transition to the new position better for your previous employer.

Your resignation should be handled in person, preferably on a Friday afternoon. Ask your direct supervisor if you can speak with him privately in

his office. When you announce your intention to resign, you should also hand your supervisor a letter which states your last date of employment with the company. Let him know that you've enjoyed working with him, but that an opportunity came along that you couldn't pass up, and that your decision to leave was made carefully, and doesn't reflect any negative feelings you have toward the company or the staff.

You should also add that your decision is final, and that you would prefer not to be made a counteroffer, since you wouldn't want your refusal to accept more money to appear as a personal affront. Let your supervisor know that you appreciate all the company's done for you; and that you'll do everything in your power to make your departure as smooth and painless as possible.

Finally, ask if there's anything you can do during the transition period over the next two weeks, such as help train your successor, tie up loose ends, or delegate tasks. Keep your resignation letter short, simple, and to the point. There's no need to go into detail about your new job, or what led to your decision to leave. If these issues are important to your old employer, he'll schedule an exit interview for you, at which time you can hash out your differences ad infinitum.

Make sure to provide a carbon copy or photocopy of your resignation letter for your company's personnel file. This way, the circumstances surrounding your resignation will be well documented for future reference.

In all likelihood, the human resource staff will want to meet with you to process your departure papers, or cover any questions you may have concerning the transfer of your medical insurance or retirement benefits.

Relocation Specialists:

Now that you've gotten your resignation out of the way, you need to shift your attention to the new company.

If a relocation is required, and you haven't done your house hunting, let me make a suggestion. Work with a relocation specialist, to give you a hand in finding a place to live in your new city or town.

Relocation specialists are brokers who make their living by matching candidates and locations, similar to the way recruiters match candidates and employers. Relocation specialists will interview you and your spouse (or significant other). Once they discover your housing and lifestyle needs, they'll refer you to Realtors who are familiar with the local communities that

satisfy your needs. Relocation specialists receive a commission or finder's fee from the Realtor, once a property is sold. There's no charge to you or your new employer.

Often, relocation specialists will be able to pre-qualify you for a mortgage loan, or refer you to an amenable mortgage broker or lending institution. Relocation specialists can also be good at handling unusual situations. For example, a relocation specialist I was working with a few years ago was able to help a candidate's wife transfer her teaching credential from California to Michigan. Without the transfer, the candidate wouldn't have been able to accept my client company's offer.

The following relocation checklist is designed to help you plan.

- To help organize your move, print this page, keep it handy, and check it off as you go.
- If possible, allow up to 30 days to plan your move and schedule any activities you want to complete before moving day.
- Avoid peak periods for moving, if possible: the first few days and the last few days of the month are times when everyone wants to move.
- Start planning early and you'll be surprised how smoothly things can go.

Two months prior to Moving Day:

- Get estimates from moving companies if you will use a mover.
- Get costs from at least two truck rental companies if you will move yourself.
- Create a floor plan of your new home for furniture and appliance placement.
- Make an inventory of your household goods and begin to remove clutter (start with the basement, attic, garage, and other storage areas).
- Start a file for all your moving paperwork (estimates, receipts, etc.).
- Arrange to transfer school records.
- Choose a mover (or truck rental company).
- Schedule a moving sale for items you won't move. Donate other items to charity getting receipts for tax records.
- Arrange for prior employer to forward tax withholding records.
- Gather personal records: medical, dental, school, birth, baptism, marriage, etc.

Six weeks prior to Moving Day:

- Obtain and fill out change-of-address cards for: Post Office, Social Security, Insurance Companies, Credit Card Companies, Magazines, Mail Order Accounts, Friends and Relatives.

- Subscribe to the paper in your new hometown to learn more about your new community.
- Make arrangements for storage if necessary.
- Ask your doctor or health plan for referrals and obtain all medical records.
- Have antiques, pieces of art, and other valuables appraised.
- Clean all closets and drawers.
- Start using foods and cleaning supplies that cannot be moved.
- Discontinue lawn, pool, and other household services.

Four weeks prior to Moving Day:

- Contact all utilities for service disconnection at your old home and connection at your new home. Be sure disconnect is the day after you leave and connection is the day before you arrive. Check for possible refunds.
- If you are moving yourself, reserve a rental truck.
- If you are packing yourself, obtain packing materials and start packing items you won't need until after you arrive at the new house.
- Arrange for special transportation of your pets and plants if necessary. Get immunization records for pets.
- Check with your insurance company to see how your possessions are covered during transit.
- Make any travel plans necessary for your move.
- Check to see if you need any moving permits.
- Plan your moving sale.

Three weeks prior to Moving Day:

- Dispose of items that cannot be moved, such as inflammable liquids.
- Prepare auto registration for transfer (if moving to another state).
- If you are moving in or out of an apartment, arrange for use of the elevator.
- Make child-care arrangements for moving day.
- Hold your moving sale.

Two weeks prior to Moving Day:

- Arrange for disposal of anything not sold at your moving sale.
- Service your car in preparation for the move.
- Return any borrowed items (including library books) and retrieve any loaned items.
- Cancel newspaper delivery.
- Notify any creditors of your move.
- Fill, transfer, and pack prescriptions for family and pets
- Assemble a file folder of information to leave for the new owner of your home.

One week prior to Moving Day:

- ❑ Defrost refrigerator and freezer, plus allow air-drying to prevent mildew. Dispose of frozen foods.
- ❑ Drain fuel from lawn mower and other power equipment being moved.
- ❑ Drain garden hose.
- ❑ Send clothing, draperies, curtains, and rugs out for cleaning and leave in wrapping. Take down curtain rods, shelves, and TV antenna

One day prior to Moving Day:

- ❑ Transfer your bank accounts.
- ❑ Take animals to vet for immunization if necessary.
- ❑ Close your safe-deposit box. Gather valuables from box, drawers, jewelry cases, and personal records and pack safely to travel with you.
- ❑ Settle any bills with local businesses.
- ❑ Drain power equipment of oil and gas.
- ❑ Drain water hoses.
- ❑ Find new homes for plants that will not be moved.
- ❑ Confirm any travel reservations.
- ❑ Two to Three Days Prior to Moving Day
- ❑ Drain your waterbed.
- ❑ Defrost refrigerator and freezer, propping doors open.
- ❑ Let movers pack your belongings (unless it's a do-it-yourself move).
- ❑ Disconnect and prepare major appliances for move.
- ❑ Set aside anything that will travel in your car so it will not be loaded on the truck.
- ❑ Pack a box of items that will be needed first at the new house. Clearly mark this box "Load Last."
- ❑ Obtain cash or traveler's checks for the trip and pay the movers.
- ❑ Confirm arrival time of your moving van.
- ❑ If moving yourself, dismantle beds and other large furniture.
- ❑ Remember to pack a box of basics you'll need on move-in day (tools, paper products, household cleaners, etc.) Either load on truck last or take in car if driving.

Moving Day:

- ❑ If using a mover, be sure someone is at the old house to answer questions.
- ❑ Note all utility meter readings.
- ❑ Read your bill of lading and inventory carefully before signing. Keep this paperwork in a safe place.
- ❑ Conduct a last minute walk through of house with mover. Make sure windows are closed, closets empty, light out, and all doors locked.
- ❑ Walk through truck before it departs to check inventory and condition of packages.

Delivery Day:

- Again, be on hand to answer any questions.
- Check your belongings carefully and note on the inventory any damaged items.
- On an interstate move, be prepared to pay the driver before your possessions are unloaded.
- Supervise unloading and unpacking.
- Be prepared to pay your mover with cash, certified check, or traveler's checks unless other arrangements have been made in advance.

In another instance, a relocation specialist was able to pinpoint the exact housing needs of a candidate and his wife, show them the perfect property, qualify them, and arrange a 5-percent down mortgage loan with a bank -- all in one morning. That afternoon, the candidate went to his final interview with my client company and accepted their offer, secure in the knowledge that his relocation wouldn't be a problem.

If your new company has a relocation specialist on staff, fine. If not, ask for a recommendation. Your relocation is too important to leave to chance, or entrust to a randomly selected real estate agent. In the event you're unable to find an independent relocation specialist, you can probably hook up with a realtor who works mainly with executive corporate transfers. Century 21, for example, does an outstanding job of matching out-of-town buyers with desirable, local properties.

Before your start date, request product information used in training to get up and running faster. Also, schedule weekly reviews for the first 2 months to ensure matching expectations.

Culture Shock and Task Clarity:

At last, you've arrived! Welcome aboard.

In the beginning, your new job may seem overwhelming. After all, there are new people to meet, new systems to learn, new schedules to keep, and new personalities to adjust to. In many ways, culture shock might be the best way to describe your first week.

The real key to early success with your new company boils down to the issue of task clarity. Task clarity refers not to your ability to do a certain job, but to your understanding of how the job's defined.

Task clarity is dependent upon the quality of communication between you and the person assigning the task. Any breakdown of task clarity will result in frustration or poor performance, or worse.

To illustrate, let me tell you the story of John, a technical writer I placed with a high tech client company in California. Three weeks after John started in his new position, I called to ask him how everything was going.

"Fine," he answered. "They love me here. I've completed the documentation on everything they've assigned me."

Later that day, I placed a call to John's boss, expecting him to heap praise on me for my recruiting genius. Boy, was I in for a surprise!

"Bill, I'm afraid I have some bad news for you," said the manager. "I'm going to fire John this afternoon. It looks like we'll have to start the search all over again."

"Really?" I was stunned. "What seems to be the problem?"

"John hasn't produced any of the documentation we need for our customers, and we have to get the work done to meet our deadline. If John can't do the work, I'll have to find someone who can."

"That's odd," I said. "I talked to John this morning and he's under the impression that the documentation he's producing is exactly what you asked for. When was the last time the two of you sat down to discuss his assignment?"

"Oh gosh," replied the manager, "it must have been about three weeks ago, right after he started to work here."

"Well then, let me make a suggestion. The two of you should talk this through, because there's obviously been a communication breakdown. As far as John's concerned, he's doing a terrific job based on his perception of the assignment."

Changing Jobs: A New Beginning:

A simple failure to communicate the task clearly in the beginning had almost resulted in John's termination three weeks after he started his new job.

Fortunately, we were all able to dodge a bullet. After my call to the employer, John and his boss sat down to discuss the project. The assignment was quickly clarified, and John went on to complete the documentation needed to meet the deadline.

John was lucky that my intervention helped save his job.

If you're working with a recruiter, make sure he or she keeps in touch with the company, to monitor your progress.

You owe it to your career to sharpen your task clarity. Ask for a weekly review for the first month or so of your employment, and try not to let things get set on automatic pilot, especially in the beginning.

With a little bit of planning, it's possible to make a smooth transition from one job to the next.