GEAR PATROL

The Right Way to Say Goodbye

How to Leave a Job Gracefully

The Office Issue

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"No one knows how classy you are until you quit," says Dan Smith, the COO of NYC-based executive search firm Raines International. The moment of separation is your final opportunity to show your dignity and professionalism, and also to keep your hard-earned professional network intact. Laurent Guerrier, president and founder of executive search firm Luxe Avenue, likes to think of a resignation as a chance to "strengthen your personal equity." To do that, you have to play the exit game rules right.

Leading up to a conversation with a boss, many employees can feel guilty or anxious, and they let emotions rule the game. Instead of getting worked up, remember that leaving is natural and that most employers won't expect you to stay at a job your entire life. Smith puts it in perspective with this reality check: "Your boss would also leave if given the right opportunity." So, keep a level head and make some good decisions — how you make the final dance happen will change based on your situation and those you work with, but here's a few good tips to help you on your way out.

Before You Have "The Talk"

Check legality. Review any paperwork you may have signed when you took the job. Specifically, anything with a non-compete clause could limit your future employment options or lead to hefty legal bills. Even if you don't like your boss or work environment, it is important to cover your bases before your finesse your resignation.

Don't slack. Though thoughts of new opportunities may eclipse current priorities and projects, resist the temptation to pull a Peter Gibbons and check out. Remember that your present employer can give glowing reference checks in the future and your performance at the end of your tenure will be freshest in their mind.

Be realistic. Temper your expectations. Relative to your tenure, your role, and the culture at your company, you could either be immediately shown the door or given a counteroffer when resigning. Make sure you know your audience.

Preparing Your Delivery

Do it in person. Have a conversation with your immediate supervisor at least two weeks in advance. Kamil Wyrzykowski, a Senior Manager at NYC-based recruitment organization Michael Page, stresses positivity and reiterates the old cliché, "It's not what you say, it's how you say it." If you approach the conversation in a positive way, your employer will be much more receptive to what you are saying. Aim to keep the conversation short and to the point without getting too clinical and cold.

Be thankful. Express appreciation for the experience and opportunities you have had at the current company. No matter what the experiences were at your job, try not to focus on past negatives.

Give compelling reasons. Explain that you've been presented with an opportunity that is too good to pass up and that it will transition your career to the next level. Share your excitement for where you're going, but be careful not to brag about it.

Be definitive. Point out that you've accepted another company's offer and ask to talk about the details of your resignation. This adds a conclusive element to your conversation and preemptively rejects any counteroffers. Unless you are hoping for a counteroffer, a current employer will appreciate not wasting time and resources trying to get you to stay.

Life in the Final Days

Show discretion. Refrain from sharing your thoughts on the current situation with colleagues. Whether you are frustrated with the current situation or think your new opportunity is the best ever, this will not help your reputation and word will get around. "Jealousy is a part of the working environment," Guerrier cautions, "You have to be very careful not to be naive about your colleagues' ultimate motivations."

Preserve your network. Try to maintain positive relationships you've developed at your current job. If business relationships and friends were made, it's okay to show that you value them. A small gift with a handwritten note will remind people of the importance you place in the relationship you formed. Smith suggests, "You can find something that is relative to the environment you work in that is not over-the-top expensive, but that goes a long way in showing the value of your friendship and partnership."

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