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The Resignation Blues

Sooner or later, most of us face the resignation blues. Resigning is never easy, especially when you've worked at a position for several years and have become part of the team. Some employers and co-workers take it personally and accuse you of abandoning ship. However, handling your resignation as professionally and thoughtfully as you handle your search for a new job can help make your resignation relatively smooth and amicable.

MAKE UP YOUR MIND

Before you submit your resignation, you must be clearly committed to leaving. Have you already pursued all avenues for advancement within your firm? Visit with your boss and other key personnel to learn where your career stands and what plans are in place for you. Give your firm every consideration. This will help you commit to your new opportunity once you decide to leave.

KEEP RESIGNATIONS SHORT, SIMPLE AND POSITIVE

Leave your employer on a positive note. Your moving on does not have to be a time for long faces. After all, you have must won an opportunity to advance, an opportunity for which you owe your employer sincere thanks. Thank your colleagues, too, for their help in preparing you to move onward and upward.

If you have given your best to the job, you will be missed - especially by those inconvenienced by your leaving! Let them know that you intend to assist them in whatever ways you can. By showing your boss and firm due respect, you encourage future support you may someday need.

When you resign, keep your conversation simple and concise. The more you say, the more questions you may have to answer. Avoid lengthy discussion about your new opportunity with your old employer. Typically, your resignations create extra work for others.

Chances are, your boss will be caught off-guard by your resignation, and will not be able to listen clearly to your explanations due to concerns about the sudden challenge your leaving presents. Because your boss is losing a valued employee, he or she may express negative opinions about your new firm or position. This will only confuse you. You may find yourself having to justify your personal goals and decisions or absorb the personal frustrations of others. If you're dealing with volatile or vindictive personalities, it may be best to avoid revealing where you will be going.

Often it's best to say that you are not at liberty to discuss where you are going or your new salary because your new employer wants it kept quiet and will announce it when you start. You can also ask for an immediate release by saying, "I'm happy to work for the next two weeks but my new employer really would like me sooner." This helps you avoid the awkward "lame duck" period and who knows, you may end up with a much needed week off to clear your head before starting with your new company.

If you feel you may face a hostile atmosphere, resign at the end of your work day so that you are no longer on company time and are in control of your schedule. Try to schedule any discussions for the following morning when everyone can face your departure after time to absorb and reflect on the news. If you have to defend yourself at this meeting, or if things begin to get out of control, ask to reschedule the meeting for a more appropriate time.

THE ORAL RESIGNATION

Resigning orally may place you in the compromising position of having to explain your decision on the spot. Words are powerfully charged when you reveal a decision which has such an impact on your organization. Choose your words with care. Your boss may want to probe for factors which led to your decision. You may be asked who or what is the reason for your leaving, or may be invited to offer suggestions to help make the organization more effective. If you have had a close relationship with your boss, you may feel obligated to answer candidly.

Don't fall for this trap! Use your head and discuss personal, heartfelt matters outside the office. Remember, your interrogator is still your boss. Whatever you say will be viewed as biased - after all, you have severed your relationship with your organization - and whatever you say may eventually be used against you. At this point, you are no longer considered a team player, nor viewed as having the company's best interest at heart.

Too often, resigning employees come to regret their comments when they are misinterpreted or exaggerated in the retelling. Constructive criticism is no longer your responsibility, and carries a high cost which could jeopardize your good references.

Instead, offer sincere praise for the firm and those with whom you worked. Prepare yourself beforehand by focusing on several positive aspects of your workplace, and mention them liberally when the opportunity arises. Even if favorite aspects were, say, the great lunches, or humorous stories told over coffee, better to mention such things than to harp on disappointments or shortcomings. (These, you are addressing by moving on to greener pastures.) You want to be perceived as a positive, constructive individual in forward motion. People will remember your last impression. Make it your best performance. You may want to tell your boss something like:

"I need to discuss something with you if you have a moment. I've been made an exceptional offer by another firm, and I've decided to accept it. My wife and I have given this opportunity a lot of thought. As much as I'd like to advance within this company, we feel the new opportunity is in our best long-term interest.

We deeply appreciate all you and the firm have done for me here. I don't think I would have been presented this exceptional opportunity if not for your support and leadership. I want to thank you. I hope I can leave with your good wishes. You've been a friend as well as a boss."

If probed for more information, you may want to claim that there is nothing else to say right now. Simply communicate that you are leaving a good opportunity for an even better one which suits your aspirations.

THE WRITTEN RESIGNATION

Written resignations give you the time to effectively prepare what you wish to communicate, and give you greater control over your delivery of the message. You can't be thrown off-track by an unexpected remark as can happen during a confrontational conversation. A written resignation also reinforces the fact that you are really leaving and are not simply threatening in order to renegotiate your position. Also, there is something permanent about the written word which often circumvents interrogation.

Under no circumstance should you state any dissatisfaction with the firm or individuals. Not only is it good manners to stress the positive when leaving, but items in your personal file may long outlast the individuals and circumstances responsible for your dissatisfaction. You never know when your path will cross those of your former colleagues.

To keep your resignation short, simple and positive, you may want to write something like:

"Dear ,

I want to thank you for all you have done for me here at [Company]. It's been a pleasure working with you, and representing the company as your [job title].

After careful consideration, I have accepted a position with another company that is more in line with my career goals. Although I consider my past and present relationship with [Company] to be very beneficial, my decision is firm. Therefore, I must submit my resignation effective [Date] (i.e., Monday, January 14th).

During the remainder of my stay, I will continue to conduct my work professionally and efficiently, and do all that I can to minimize the effects of my departure.

I wish [Company] continued success, and I want to thank you for allowing me to be a part of your team. Please feel free to contact me at any time if I can be of further assistance in helping with a smooth transition.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

Letters get filed and passed around to explain what happened, reducing the call for endless orations on the same subject. They also dispel any perceived ambivalence in your behavior during this delicate time.

LEAVE ON THE RIGHT NOTE

Before leaving the firm, take time to speak with each of your support staff, peers, executive personnel and others with whom you've worked. To the extent practical, clear up any unfinished business. Be sensitive to others' reactions and keep your conversations positive and constructive.

Some people may naturally express their own discontentment and may egg you on to agree with them. Don't! Instead, express your appreciation and tell your colleagues you'll miss them. A little time spent nurturing relationships before leaving for your new job will go a long way to build support for your future.

Also keep in mind that it is professional courtesy to give your employer ample notice to help them prepare for your departure - typically 2 to 4 weeks. However, you should try to get out as soon as possible to avoid recurring invitations to tell your story, and to avoid having to deal with the frustrations and pressures at the job as the firm adjusts to your leaving.

Counter Offer Acceptance

Road to Career Ruin

Mathew Henry, the 17th-century writer said, "Many a dangerous temptation comes to us in fine gay colours that are but skin deep." The same can be said for counteroffers, those magnetic enticements designed to lure you back into the nest after you've decided it's time to fly.

The litany of horror stories I have come across in my years as an executive recruiter, consultant and publisher provides a litmus test that clearly indicates counteroffers should never be accepted ... EVER!

I define a counteroffer simply as an inducement from your current employer to get you to stay after you've announced your intention to take another job. We're not talking about those instances when you receive an offer but don't tell your boss. Nor are we discussing offers that you never intended to take, yet tell your employer about anyway as a "they-want-me-but-I'm-staying-with-you" ploy.

These are merely astute positioning tactics you may choose to use to reinforce your worth by letting your boss know you have other options. Mention of a true counteroffer, however, carries an actual threat to quit.

Interviews with employers who make counteroffers, and employees, who accept them, have shown that as tempting as they may be, acceptance may cause career suicide. During the past 20 years, I have seen only isolated incidents in which an accepted counteroffer has benefited the employee. Consider the problem in proper perspective.

What really goes through a boss's mind when someone quits?

- This couldn't be happening at a worse time.
- This is one of my best people. If I let him quit now, it'll wreak havoc on the morale of the departments.
- I've already got one opening in my department. I don't need another right now.
- This will probably screw up the entire vacation schedule.
- I'm working as hard as I can, and I don't need to do his work too.
- If I lose another good employee, the company might decide to lose me too.
- My review is coming up and this will make me look bad.
- Maybe I can keep him on until I find a suitable replacement.

What will the boss say to keep you in the nest? Some of these comments are common.

- I'm really shocked. I thought you were as happy with us as we are with you. Let's discuss it before you make your final decision.
- Aw gee. I've been meaning to tell you about the great plans we have for you, but it's been confidential until now.
- The VP has you in mind for some exciting and expanding responsibilities.
- Your raise was scheduled to go into effect next quarter, but we'll make effective immediately.
- You're going to work for whom?

Let's face it. When someone quits, it's a direct reflection on the boss. Unless you're really incompetent or a destructive thorn in his side, the boss might look bad by "allowing" you to go. His gut reaction is to do what has to be done to keep you from leaving until he's ready. That's human nature.

Unfortunately, it's also human nature to want to stay unless your work life is abject misery. Career change, like all ventures into the unknown, is tough. That's why bosses know they can usually keep you around by pressing the right buttons.

Before you succumb to a tempting counteroffer, consider these universal truths:

- Any question in which an employee is forced to get an outside offer before the present employer will suggest a raise, promotion or better working conditions is suspect.
- No matter what the company says when making its counteroffer, you will always be considered a fidelity risk. Having once demonstrated your lack of loyalty (for whatever reason), you will lose your status as a "team player" and your place in the inner circle.
- Counteroffers are usually nothing more than stall devices to give your employer time to replace you on their timetable ... not yours.
- Your reasons for wanting to leave still exist. Conditions are just a bit more tolerable in the short term because of the raise, promotion or promises made to keep you.
- Counteroffers are only made in response to a threat to quit. Will you have to solicit an offer and threaten to quit every time you deserve better working conditions?
- Decent and well-managed companies don't make counteroffers ... EVER! Their policies are fair and equitable. They will not be subjected to "counteroffer coercion" or what they perceive as blackmail.

If the urge to accept a counteroffer hits you, continue to clean out your desk as you count your blessings.

Best of luck to you in your new position!