

HOW TO QUIT YOUR JOB WITH DIGNITY



These days, employees change jobs about as often as a professional ballplayers change teams, and pretty much for the same reasons: A better opportunity to succeed, a more pleasant venue. And, oh yeah, there's always the prospect of making more money.

Not that there's anything wrong with that. Sure, the staff directory gets outdated as soon as it's slipped into the mail slots. But with the 'company man' concept clearly passé, talented employees are taking advantage of in-demand status to leap from one job to another--sometimes plotting a future move before they've even had a chance to work out in the new corporate fitness center.

While leaving a company after a year doesn't bear the stigma of decades ago, it's never advisable for an executive to burn bridges upon departure. After all, the constant office shuffle means you may someday be **seeking another job** with those same bosses. You want to leave with a reputation as a real pro. Similarly, you also need to be smart about heading to a new job. So how, exactly, does one make a smart, smooth transition? Here's what the experts are saying:

Before changing jobs, ask key questions.

Evaluate honestly whether you actually need to move.

- Do you watch the clock often?
- Do you call in sick when you're not?
- Has your performance slipped because of poor motivation or incompetence?
- Do you look forward to going to work?

The **best time to leave a job** is when you feel you've outgrown your current job. It no longer provides the rewards or perks you need most.

If it's time to move on, be as skeptical about a new employer as you are about the current one. Too often, employees take a "grass is always greener" approach when job hunting. When a new offer actually comes through, however, it's no longer fantasy time. Get honest answers from employees about the work culture, productivity demands, and other factors that affect day-to-day life at the new company. Find out about its fiscal health and business plan.

Does it have a track record of layoffs when times get rough? (Nobody can count on a strong economy lasting forever.) Visit the company often enough to get a good flavor for the atmosphere. Avoid the following traps: Working for someone you don't respect. Taking a job you won't enjoy. Accepting a promotion to a job you don't like for money and prestige. Taking a job that has poor chemistry.

And here's one fundamental question that too often gets overlooked:

Do employees enjoy working there?

After all, the office is where they spend most of their waking hours. You might be suspicious if everyone there is romantically unattached to anyone outside of work, if the bosses always spring for free lunches and pizza at night. It could be a sweatshop, allowing no time to get a life.

Once the decision is made, play it cool with your soon-to-be former company. Don't tip your hand before the offer is concrete. But, once it's a done deal, don't be wishy-washy about disclosing your plans either. Tell your boss as soon as you have the written agreement in your hands, signed sealed and delivered, not sooner. Until you have that agreement, the other company can always change their mind. Make it a point to tell your boss ASAP, considering the above situation so he or she won't hear it from someone else.

Always be gracious and appreciative in announcing that you're leaving--both in writing and in conversation. Everyone has workplace gripes. But class acts don't dwell about the small stuff, even when they have one foot out the door. Always make it a positive-sounding transition. To learn more. To earn more. Rather than to get away from a tyrannical boss and the bureaucratic thinking.

How much time should you give? Depends. Certainly enough to finish any important work assignment, or get it in good enough shape to hand off. Two weeks' notice may sound like something rooted in Ward Cleaver's day but, in this case, old school still rules. It's simply bad form to give anything less.

Be proactive during this time; don't flaunt your 'lame duck' status by dogging it. If possible, get together with the person who will take over your duties and walk through every vital aspect of your job. Communicate with your employer). Ask what you can do to make the transition as smooth as possible. Talk to your co-workers, employees that you manage, your clients, and any vendors or third parties who might be affected by your leaving. This will ensure that you leave on a happy note.

Make sure you go out in style. Send personal notes or e-mails to let co-workers and bosses know how much you grew because of them, Talley advises. Get all the telephone numbers and e-mail addresses you need before you leave. Those former colleagues can now serve as vital networking resources. "This is a great way to build bridges at the end of your term," Talley says. "Stay in touch with your old peers, and also with the boss. Make it a point to have lunch with the old boss. You always need old friends in new places."

During the transition, don't just show up on your first day of work. If the new company is nearby, stop in when you get a break. Offer to take home materials to brief yourself on your new duties. Get familiar with the technology and office protocols. You'll be sending the message that you plan to be a serious contributor to the company's future success.

Another good idea--time permitting--is to "shadow" someone on the job. Spend a day with someone on your soon-to-be team. Ask questions. Observe what the person does on a typical day, and take good notes about the expectations and requirements of the job, the work environment, and the interactions with other people.