



Point of View

Avoid Bridge-Burning by Leaving Your Job Gracefully

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Leaving your job might seem like an ending. In truth, it's also the beginning of the next phase of your career. And unless you are planning on changing careers and relocating to a foreign country, how you leave your old job is key to your success in your new job. Do it right, you've won career boosters for life. Do it wrong, you'll never live it down.

So, here are the top six strategies for moving on and burnishing your professional reputation:

Make sure your boss is the first to know

Don't let your boss learn of your plans from someone else. Right there, you've lost the chance to leave on a high note. So speak to your boss first. Be positive and respectful, offer thanks, and make it clear that you will help smooth the transition.

One caveat: Some employers want departing employees to leave immediately. So be sure you have removed personal files from your computer and cleared up other loose ends.

Also, have a short resignation letter ready to go. Remember that the letter will become part of your employee file. Be judicious.

Resist the urge to take a counter-offer

Be prepared for a counter-offer from your current company. Unless it truly addresses all the factors that led you to look elsewhere, you will probably find yourself job-hunting again in six months. Also, you have now alerted your superiors and co-workers to the fact that you have one foot out the door.

In addition, if you accept a counter-offer, you have let down the company you planned to join.

Smoothing the transition

This is your chance to really shine as a professional. First, work with your boss to find a mutually agreeable end date. Then, finish up everything on your desk. If possible, let your successor start fresh. Create a transition document that spells out important information, including where to find things and a list of contacts.

If possible, offer to be a resource for your successor.

People, like elephants, have long memories

Despite what has happened in the past, you are moving on and you must take the high road. It's amazing how many otherwise intelligent people can't resist the urge to tell off their co-workers. You will see these people again, in one context or another. There is nothing to be gained by a scorched-earth departure.

On the other side of that equation, express your appreciation to people you've worked with, from subordinates to superiors, who have supported you and enhanced your work life.

Get a letter of recommendation from your boss

There are two reasons for this. First, we live in a very mobile society and people move, change jobs, shift careers. The second is that you want your recommendation to be as specific as possible. Your accomplishments will be much easier to recount while the information is still fresh.

Get what's coming to you

Be sure you understand where you stand in terms of vacation and sick time, pensions, profit-sharing and your 401K; and COBRA, which allows you to continue your health insurance coverage.