

Finding the Exit

Leaving on Your Terms

By Karyl Innis

You've had it! You're not going to take it one more day! Tomorrow you're going to walk into the "Corner Office" and say, "I quit!"

True...you don't have another job yet; but, that really won't be much of a problem. And, compared to the satisfaction of walking out of there...well, you just want to get out!

Wait a minute. Don't just quit. There's much to think about yet.

I've been in the business of helping corporate employees transition from one job to their next job for over 10 years. At my company, we see the corporate warriors as well as the walking wounded. Our forte is career counseling for corporate employees and career outplacement for separating employees.

I've seen business executives who've done a great job of parting company with a troublesome employer—garnering transition pay, good references, extended health insurance benefits, outplacement services, company car purchases, country club membership conversions, and a whole host of other intangibles. I've also seen corporate employees who have gained the satisfaction of quitting—and then exit their place of employment with nothing more than a final paycheck and a dubious reference.

If you are considering leaving your employer, and you haven't been lured away by another opportunity, consider carefully how you'll take leave. There's money and reputation at stake.

THING TO CONSIDER

Negotiating when the subject is you, your own worth and values, can feel awkward, but a little preparation and thoughtful self-examination can make the process easier. Ask yourself these questions:

Why am I really fed up? Is it your fault? Her fault? Or their fault? Usually there's a little culpability on both sides. It's this fact that gives them guilt and you room to maneuver.

What do you really want? Do you need the security of another month's health insurance? Or do you just want to buy your PC from the company at a greatly reduced rate? Knowing what the company policy and its past practices are can help shape a realistic answer to this question.

What problems will occur by your leaving? Will work back up? Costs be incurred? Projects get behind? The answers may provide you leverage to negotiate additional separation benefits in return for easing the problems created.

NEGOTIATING YOUR SEPARATION

When you have honestly answered the questions above, you're ready to move to the next step: negotiating your separation. Here's how:

First, set an appointment with the appropriate person. Begin the conversation with "I have something serious to discuss with you."

If you are considering leaving your employer, and you haven't been lured away be another opportunity, consider carefully how you'll take leave. There's money and reputation at stake.

Then briefly state the tension and the problems you've identified. State your decision to "find a way to leave the company gracefully and comfortably for all concerned."

Outline the problem(s) (no more than two) you're aware of that your leaving will create and your intention to work with the "Corner Office" and others to mitigate these problems.

In addition, identify your personal concerns about leaving. Your answer to



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question number two above helps here. Do you need references? More money? Extended health insurance?

Suggest what you are willing to do in return for the enhanced benefit(s) you want. Are you willing to: answer questions on the phone for three months? Review project proposals on Saturday morning? Not recruit from the firm? The list of possibilities goes on.

Agree on the terms of your exit or agree to get back together later that day to discuss final terms. Finally, decide how your separation will be announced. When? By whom?

Be sure to put your resignation in writing, along with your negotiated exit agreements on a separate page referencing your resignation.

Will this be easy? No. However, the satisfaction of taking leave gracefully will stay with you forever...just like your references.

A FINAL NOTE

Be prepared for the "Corner Office's" response. It could be a version of any of the following four:

"Okay, let's agree on terms."

"Okay, you can leave today."

"Okay, but I can't change any benefits for you."

"Okay, I understand your concerns...how can I help you stay?"

Since you were planning to leave anyway, the first three answers shouldn't be a surprise. But what about answer number four? Well...staying after you've threatened to leave...That's the subject of another column!

What can be negotiated?

Not everything at every company is negotiable, but the following is a list of those things that are negotiated most often at separation time:

Unemployment benefits: Will the company contest your claims for unemployment compensation?

Severance pay: Can you receive company policy severance pay even though you've initiated the separation?

Reimbursement Educational tuition: Are you still attending classes? Will they pay at the end of the semester even though you're no longer there? If your goal is to return to school, how about an educational leave, with tuition reimbursement?

Employment status: Do you want to move from active status to leave-of-absence status? Or active to inactive?

Health insurance: Can it be extended beyond your last day at work?

Vacation pay: What happens if you have already used vacation that wasn't really due you? Will they forgive it? What happens to any unused vacation time?

References: What will they say to whom?

Profit Sharing, Incentives, Annual Bonus: Can these be prorated or can you receive the full share?

Outplacement: Does the company have a history of providing outplacement to departing employees? Even if they don't, will they provide it for you?

Office furniture: Can you buy your custom-designed, specially ordered furniture from the company?

Hardware, software or other personal technology devices: Does the company allow for purchase of these items?

Company cars: Do you want to buy out the lease?

Club: Are there any conversion or extension privileges for dining club or country club?

Pensions: Don't leave anything on the table here. Ask for the present value of your pension. Are you bridged or hooked-up from any prior interrupted or predecessor employment?

Loans: Do you hold any outstanding corporate loans? Negotiate the pay-outs or ask about incremental loan forgiveness.

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