



Exit with Style

By Roger Olofsson

As Oasis so beautifully put it, “don't look back in anger, I heard you say”, a lyric well sung by anyone aged 30-50 or any Britpop aficionado. And how correct they were, as with every new career opportunity we find, we sadly say goodbye to our last job and there's much to say about leaving with style, dignity and without regret. Indeed, leaving gracefully and behaving well as you exit the front door of your employer will both enhance your prospects and is likely to bring with it new opportunities. So, the question is, how do you exit?

The rationale

Firstly, do not lie about why you're leaving. Take time to think about the best and most diplomatic spin you can put on it, the same way you would do leaving any relationship. “I feel I need to widen my experience” is much better than saying “I'm tired of your company and its constant promises of promotion”. When you do announce that you are leaving, make sure you give precisely the same reason to everyone. People love nothing more than creating their own theories as to why you left, which can only lead to bad press for you, and it certainly does nothing for your reputation once you've exited the door.

Keep it quiet

Every workplace is rife with gossip and rumours. So, when you start taking a mysterious half-day holiday to meet a head-hunter or new potential employer, keep things firmly under wraps. Do not let anyone suspect that you're on your way out and do not talk to colleagues about the interviews you've had. There are two reasons for this. One, it makes you appear

uncommitted to your current job and; two, if nothing comes of your new career hunt, you've clearly 'shot yourself in the foot' with your current employer. So, keep any new opportunity quiet, until you've formally signed the contract for your new position.

Resignation Letter

Keep it simple, honest, clear and polite, after all, the network you've created in your current organisation is listening. Tell your boss you are leaving for a new challenge and that you've thoroughly enjoyed working at the company (even if the last few months have been pure hell). Do mention your notice period and say that you will do everything you can to help a smooth handover. That's it. The letter must always be formal, typed and signed personally. Do not send an email. Definitely do not send SMS or WhatsApp. The letter must leave your current employer with a clear view that you are a true professional at the top of your game, even when facing difficult times.

Speak to your boss first

We all tend to avoid that difficult and awkward conversation, but this is one that you need to tackle face on. Deliver the letter in person, ideally when your boss has a quiet moment. Do not discuss your resignation with colleagues first as it's highly insulting for your boss to hear that you're leaving from anyone other than you. Do not appear apologetic at this meeting, after all, you're moving onwards and upwards. Moving to pastures new. Always be humble and respect your manager's position.

Keep your boss onside

There's a lot to be said for self-preservation wherever possible. Thanking your boss politely for being a great manager could mean, a) they are less likely to hold you to that six-month notice period, b) they will give you a good reference, either formally or informally. More importantly, c) they will remain a great connection in your network for the future. Remember too that your boss' feelings may also be bruised, by quitting you are effectively firing him or her.

Be prepared

Always expect your boss will also act professionally and take the news well. However, they may counter-offer, start to negotiate, turn nasty or even ask security to march you out of the building on the spot. If things do turn unpleasant, try and de-personalise and de-escalate the situation. Keep your professional

image, even if your boss does not. If you are told to leave the building, do so and contact them when they've had a chance to calm down. In the very worst situations, stay calm and remember you can always agree your leaving obligations through HR.

Who can you tell

Assuming all goes well, ask your boss if you can make your decision public – as they may wish to keep your resignation under wraps for a while. If they do want to keep it quiet, you might ask them if you can tell a few key people such as your peer or mentor. However, if your boss is happy for you to make it public, tell your team quickly as rumours spread fast. Be grateful, positive and tell them how much you've enjoyed working with them.

Reject the counter-offer

Counter-offers from a boss who wants you to stay are always worth listening to (and maybe highly flattering) but very rarely worth accepting. They're often made because your manager is panicking or desperate, and besides, once you've made the decision to leave, mentally you've already left. Staying for more money rarely works out and often just means a second, messier resignation six months later.

Ready to negotiate

There's always some negotiation, often about leaving dates. So, come up with a list of bargaining chips you can bring to the table. For example, if your boss wants you to work your full notice period, you might counter with "I have three weeks untaken holiday" or "If I guarantee to deliver this workstream can I go 10 days early?". Always think what would happen in the reverse situation and the employer wanted to exit you. Would they be so flexible on exit date? I think not.

Keep it neat

You do not want to be remembered as the one who left three projects unfinished and problems which are still being discovered six months later. Make sure you tie up loose ends and complete any admin. If possible, hand over smoothly to your successor and help them settle in well. Doing this will mean that you're remembered in a positive light – and who knows where your colleagues will be in 3-5 years. Keep opportunities open and your network positive at every stage.

Publish your move

Do publish your move on LinkedIn or any other social media platform you tend to use. Do let your network know you've moved on to pasture new... BUT make sure you only do this after you've actually started the new role, never during your notice period, else you can expect a letter from your previous company's lawyer.

Leaving drinks

Everyone likes a party and they care little for the reason why it's time for a drink or two. So, on your final Friday, take your team, your boss and anyone else you've worked with down to the bar. The last thing you do should be to have a great leaving do. BUT, even after a few drinks, stick to the plan, do not tell your boss what you really think of him or her. Stay professional.

Final word

Here at Olofsson & Company, we have been fortunate enough to place many people into new careers and talking people through the exit process is just as critical as impressing their new employer. Your network thrives on what you add and how you treat it, so always leave with grace, style and never look back in anger.

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