



LEAVING A JOB PROFESSIONALLY

Wrapping Up Your Current Position Before Moving On

"It is after all, the ending that makes the beginning possible."

William Bridges

All jobs have a beginning, middle and an end. After carefully considering all your options, you decide it is time to leave your current job. Whatever the reason for that decision, leaving in a professional way involves attention to both practical and the psychological tasks of letting go. Read on to learn what you can do to help ensure a smooth transition for yourself and all those affected by your departure.

THE RESIGNATION PROCESS

A formal resignation is the first step in your departure. *The suggestions below are intended to help you complete this step with style and dignity:*

1. PROVIDE APPROPRIATE NOTIFICATION

- Provide your employer with the standard amount of notice expected in your industry and position. Consider human resource policies, what you want to complete before you leave, and the time needed to fill your position. When possible, allow sufficient time for the organization to fill your role.
- Inform your boss in person before telling anyone else. Prepare what you are going to say before you meet, including how you will respond if your boss has a strong emotional reaction or offers you incentives to stay. Before the meeting, get clear about what it would take to keep you in your current job, if anything. During the meeting, maintain your composure, be professional, be positive, and don't say anything you may regret later. Before ending the meeting, agree on specific next steps including who will inform others, how, and when.
- Submit a brief letter of resignation that includes the date of the letter, name, position, effective date of departure, reason for leaving, and your signature. If you are leaving on good terms, express appreciation for the opportunities you have had to learn and gain valuable skills. Be positive and do not include negative comments. Remember, your letter will remain in your personnel file for future reference use.
- Inform key colleagues who will be most impacted by your departure and then inform your staff. Be personable, positive, and factual. Focus your explanation for leaving on the future rather than the past. Be prepared for a range of emotional reactions from them. When you talk with others will depend on what was decided when you met with your boss.

2. PARTICIPATE IN AN EXIT INTERVIEW

- Be prepared to respond to questions you may be asked about why you are leaving or recommendations you have to improve things. If you choose to respond, be polite, tactful, and succinct. Remember, this is your company's last impression of you. Refrain from saying anything that isn't constructive.

THE TRANSITION BETWEEN RESIGNING AND DEPARTING

Once your resignation is announced, it's time to get organized and attend to others' feelings and needs related to your departure. *The suggestions below focus on the practical tasks necessary to ensure a smooth transition:*

1. COMPLETE CURRENT PRIORITIES

- Maintain a high performance level; don't disappear or slack off before you leave.
- Stay focused on what's most important and deliver your commitments on time.
- Complete project paperwork and reports.
- Complete all performance evaluations.

2. ASSIST YOUR SUCCESSOR; TRANSITION YOUR WORK

- Document specific information about the status of work in progress and issues needing attention. Include short-term operational matters as well as longer term strategic issues.
- Make your files and notes easy to understand and locate.
- Pass on "insider" tips about how to get work done effectively or navigate organizational procedures.
- If you do tasks that no one else knows how to do, offer to train someone prior to leaving.
- Transition relationships. If possible, introduce key contacts to the person who will be taking your place.
- Clean off your computer and clean out personal items from your work space.

3. HELP OTHERS MANAGE YOUR DEPARTURE

- Identify who and how key people will be impacted by your departure. Meet with them to discuss specific job related tasks and to explore their concerns about your departure.
- Be gracious about what others want to do to acknowledge your departure.
- Express appreciation - thank those who mentored and supported you along the way.
- Ensure staff members have the resources they need to do their jobs. This may include linking them to key personnel inside and outside the organization.
- Contact key business colleagues, clients, and vendors to let them know when your last day is and whom they should contact after you leave.
- For those in the company and in the industry with whom you want to stay connected, let them know how to contact you. Gather their contact information to keep as part of your professional network.
- If there are people with whom you want to maintain a friendship after you are no longer colleagues, let them know.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TASKS OF LETTING GO

When you have been invested in people and in a company, you have created an identity and there are losses that are part of your departure. Leaving your job is an ending and, with any ending, there is a period of adjustment during which you will experience an array of feelings. *The suggestions below are intended to help you accelerate your process of letting go and moving on:*

1. DISIDENTIFY WITH THE JOB

- Be reflective: articulate what you are most proud about, any major regrets, what you are losing, and what you are gaining.
- Identify any interpersonal issues you need to deal with before you leave.
- Consider what you want to initiate to orchestrate your farewell in addition to what others want to do for you.

2. MANAGE YOUR EMOTIONAL STATE

- Be aware of what you are experiencing so you can better manage your mood and your behavior.
- Think about endings you have experienced before and how you moved through them.
- Get curious about what is possible in the future.
- Take care of your health: exercise, eat well, and get enough sleep.
- Stay connected to your social support systems.
- Avoid speaking negatively about your work environment or being overly positive about what's next for you. Remember your colleagues will continue to work in the same environment.

3. BE READY FOR YOUR NEW BEGINNING

- Take time to rest and renew your spirit. If possible, take a vacation between jobs.
- Arrive refreshed at your new job. Make sure you have the mental and emotional energy to hit the ground running, meet new people and learn new systems.
- Update your professional information on LinkedIn or other websites.

HARD WON WISDOM – WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

- You know your job better than anyone else. Offer suggestions that help transition your work and reduce the negative impact on others.
- Be optimistic, sincere and realistic; resist the urge to focus on the negative.
- Remember that people respond to loss in different ways and will have different reactions to your departure; be sensitive to others.
- A past employer or former colleague can be an incredibly helpful resource in your career. Be considerate and leave on good terms. You never know when you might work with your former colleagues again. Don't brag, complain, say negative things about anyone, or make enemies on your way out.