



CAREER COACH
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SO LONG, FAREWELL

While saying goodbye at work can be really hard (or a huge relief), ensure that you conduct yourself professionally and complete all tasks at hand

Last week, I had a bunch of email and voice mail messages from an ex-colleague, wanting an employment verification and recommendation letter. No doubt, the young lady in question had been good at her job. However, I wasn't about to dash off a glowing recommendation. Last Christmas, when she was still working with us, she just sent a text in the middle of the night saying she wouldn't be back at work and then disappeared. No email, no messages, no contact. No handover, no access to files, no explanation. Weeks later, after frantic and worried attempts to contact her, I ran into her sister, who mumbled that she was indeed alive, fine and had started a new job.

My anger aside, I understood that she was immature, excited about the new job and took the easy way out of avoiding the messy process of saying goodbye, and dealing with the handing-over process. Much like an annoying boyfriend who decides to break-up, forgets to let the girl know and leaves her to figure things out for herself. Whether you are the terminator or the terminated, goodbyes can be messy, particularly so when your stint in a company has been significant. So, how do you ensure that you handle the farewell, well?

Practicalities, first. Before you resign, review any legal and contractual obligations you may have—non-compete arrangements, notice periods, non-poaching clauses, bonus clawbacks. List the status of your ongoing projects, and start outlining transition plans. Back up your personal information and Rolodex. Think through whether you might consider a counter-offer, if there was to be one. Prepare, perhaps rehearse, your conversation where you inform your company about your decision to leave.

Next, make sure you speak to your boss first, before you enthusiastically share the news with colleagues. Schedule a conversation, preferably in person. Have the preliminary chat, state your position calmly. Understand that there is likely to be anger and disappointment, perhaps resistance to the action that you have initiated. You can't control these responses, but you can control how

you behave. You can choose to conduct yourself professionally, with grace and dignity, and help the company through your exit. Respect that there may be a period of adjustment that your supervisors may need to go through. Give them time to absorb this, and react. Be prepared to have a discussion about your reasons, and do hear out any suggestions that may come up, calmly. If indeed you do reconsider your decision, put a timeline on the process and close it as quickly as feasible.

After this, as soon as possible, resign in writing. This sets the clock in motion, and puts a timeline on your departure. Be prepared to honour your contractual obligations, sign the non-disclosures, and work through a transition plan. Put together a handover checklist, offer to brief colleagues, suggest a replacement, if asked to do so. Mutually agree on the content and timing of internal and external communication regarding your departure—client messaging, announcements, handovers, etc. Most importantly, while you are serving your notice, honour your commitments. Tempting as it may be to take off on that camping trip, chances are that your company needs you to complete tasks with even more intensity before you leave. Do commit to this to the best of your ability. Your reputation depends on this.

Even if you do have angst, consider keeping your tone and general communication positive, or at least neutral. Publicly trashing your employer—in person or online—is generally not a good idea. Be wary—what you might consider a private conversation may end up being shared. At this stage, till official communication is complete, perhaps hold off on sharing the news of your new job on social media.

At work, complete all the house-keeping. Make sure you have handed over all company property, including proprietary documents, and make sure that this is recorded. Clear personal paperwork relating to transfer of benefits and insurances and complete your exit formalities. Do clear your desk, remove any personal effects and remember to delete personal emails and voicemails.

Draft a note about where things are filed, list your external interfaces and their contact details. Provide your contact details, should people need to reach you later. Consider asking for a statement of work, a record of your activities and achievements on the job. Remember to update your professional media profile.

Exit interviews can be tricky. Tempting though it may be to sound off on your boss' style and the general strategy, it's usually a good idea to focus on a few positive suggestions on business issues rather than personal issues and working styles—and be wary of communicating too much at interviews conducted by relatively junior staff.

All this apart, the hardest part of saying goodbye is emotional. It's human nature to sometimes focus on the negative at this time, often to justify to yourself why you are leaving—but try to be fair and focus on the positive as well, show gratitude for the opportunities you had got. Excited as you are about the new job, consider that people with whom you worked may feel let down or disappointed—invest in one-on-one communication, to give them closure. At this time, you may want to resist the temptation to diss the company, or overly tom-tom your new situation and compensation.

Make an effort to say goodbye, and say "thank you" to people you worked with. Don't destroy your legacy and goodwill in the company by slinking out into the night. Honour your association with the company, give it the respect that it deserves—the dignity and grace of a professional goodbye.

As for my young ex-colleague? Unfortunately, in the professional world, taking shortcuts often have reputational and other consequences, as she soon learnt. As the song goes, "There must be 50 ways to leave your lover". Maybe you don't want to just slip out the back, Jack.

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Making an exit:
Don't destroy your goodwill in the company by slinking out without a proper handover.