

How Not to Quit Your Job

Shake your employer's hand and thank him or her for the opportunity provided.

"I'm calling to let you know I've accepted another job." That's how a Monday morning began as an employee shared the news over the phone.

"I'm sorry to hear that," I said. "When is your last day?"

"I'm giving two weeks notice," he said to my relief. "But here's the thing: I wanted to give two weeks notice last Monday, but you were on vacation last week, and I didn't want to ruin your vacation. So I'm giving retroactive two weeks notice. Since it's retroactive to last Monday, my last day will be this Friday."

Retroactive notice. That's a new one for me. Welcome back from vacation.

The list of bizarre resignations I've received doesn't begin or end with retroactive notice. There was the email from an employee who had a reputation for having a party lifestyle, received at 1:00 a.m. on a Saturday, only to be later rescinded.

My appreciation grows over time for the candor of the maintenance team member who shared his displeasure upon being asked to work a Saturday. "I refuse to work for Hitler," he said as he submitted his resignation to the operations manager requesting the overtime. Safe to say, about the only time you can refer to your boss as Hitler would be in submitting your resignation.

Between the notice and the departure dates, take care to transfer knowledge and information to those who will be assuming your responsibilities.

The customer service representative who placed a small bag of caramels on the hood of our vice president's automobile, together with a short note she wouldn't be coming back to work the following day—or ever—earned points for creativity.

A conversation in the front office was once interrupted by the spouse of a vacationing employee who entered the front door, asked for the sweater his wife had left at her desk and then informed us that she was done working for our company. When I inquired as to the reason, he stated, "It's all been said." A decade later, I'm not quite sure what her gripe was.

The list goes on. It includes the sales team member who gave notice after working for us for only a few months, stated that his two weeks notice would include "unused vacation," and then sent his company computer back with the hard drive completely wiped, leaving us to wonder what activity he didn't want us to find on it. Also included is the 20-plus-year employee who simply didn't come to work one day. We never heard from him again.

Let's I be tagged an ogre, I've employed hundreds of people over the years, and, to my knowledge, the vast majority were

perfectly happy working with me. The foregoing are the exceptions to the rule that there is a classy, professional way to part ways with an employer when the time comes, and then there is, well, see above.

Permanently paranoid about burning bridges, I have gone out of my way to ensure a smooth transition on the handful of occasions that I have made a career move. I still remember the uncomfortable meeting at which I gave notice to the contract manufacturing company I had led for a decade. That mid-January afternoon, I sat in our board chairman's living room, and we planned the transition that would end in my departure toward the end of March. I burned the candle at both ends for more than two months to ensure that everything would be completely in order for the person stepping into the role I left behind.

Eight years later, after communicating my planned departure from the company that had acquired my employer six months earlier, I remained on board for nearly seven months to ensure that neither my employer nor my coworkers nor our customers would suffer any ill effects of my resignation.

Expecting an employee to offer two to seven months notice of a departure is neither realistic nor necessary in most instances, but with the "Hitler resignation" at the other extreme, I think we can all agree that doing all one can to ensure a smooth transition is in the interest of both the employee and the employer.

After hiring a newly recruited employee, I am generally eager to add him or her to the team as soon as possible, although I not only understand but appreciate it when the new employee looks out for his or her former employer. After all, I would expect the same level of consideration should that new employee elect to move on at some future date. Feeling the same way, most employers will accommodate a request to push a start date back a week or two longer if necessary for a smooth transition.

Between the notice and the departure dates, take care to transfer knowledge and information to those who will be assuming your responsibilities. Organize emails, and electronic and paper files, and clean your office; I'll never forget the dead bird we found behind one departed sales team member's desk. To the extent your employer allows it, notify outside contacts, taking care to say nothing but positive things about the employer you're leaving.

Finally, almost regardless of how miserable your experience might have been, shake your employer's hand and thank him or her for the opportunity provided. You never know when that relationship might come in handy again. ■■



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