

TEN STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL GOODBYE

How to complete the final chapter in your current job

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The first impression you make on a new job is important, but so is your last one. In a volatile workplace, your resume is likely to become dotted with career changes and new skills. Being flexible and adjusting emotionally as you leave one job and prepare for another are essential career-survival skills.

How you leave says a lot about you, whatever the circumstances. The process of leaving isn't about packaging a box and moving to a new place. It's about cementing relationships and establishing a network that will ensure you a place in the business world. It's also about realizing that the desk next to you at a future employer may be occupied by your former boss.

To stay emotionally grounded while saying good-bye and beginning your transition, apply the following 10 strategies:

1. Express your appreciation and stay connected.

Take time to reminisce with colleagues about projects you've worked on, special times you shared and joint accomplishments. Consider sending short thank-you notes after you leave that mentions their contributions to your success. Make sure co-workers have your address and phone numbers and remember to stay in touch with them.

Regardless of the circumstances involving a job change, it's important to "maintain dignity" and avoid embarrassing "yourself by burning bridges with co-workers and managers," says Don Kelley, a human-resources specialist at Texas Utilities in Dallas. Their ties to you are important links to the future.

2. Let go.

Letting go of security, embracing a new opportunity and exploring the unknown takes courage. Focus on what is instead of what was, Dr. Kelley advises. Since the primary safety net during periods of change is self-confidence, Dr. Kelley reminds employees in transition that they'll fit in and find a new identity.

During change, "your ability to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty will stand as a critical skill," says Price Pritchett, founder of Pritchett and Associates in Dallas and author of "New Work Habits for a Radically Changing World" (1996, Pritchett Publishing Co.). "Learn to loosen up and be willing to wing it."

3. Leave your office in top shape.

Be meticulous about how you leave your office. Only take files that belong to you and make sure your desk, computer, records and files are neat, organized and complete. Provide employees with updates and leave notes about on-going projects.

4. Create a morale-building file.

Keep a file of positive work evaluations, thank-you notes and other documents that will supply you with enthusiasm, courage and hope in the upcoming weeks. Realize you've made a difference in others' lives and will do so again.

5. Don't be critical.

Avoid criticizing your company, co-workers and managers or participation in negative conversations about these subjects. You may feel bitter or demoralized, but letting others know your feelings will backfire.

Remember and discuss the positive events you experienced, even if there were only a few of them. Those left behind can feel disoriented or unsettled. Being a peacemaker will help you be remembered positively.

6. Prepare, reflect and move on.

Recognize that every work experience has value, and view your job as a bridge to the next one. Be introspective, realistic and excited. Dream about what might be. "There's always a place for talented people," says Alex McKenna, president of McKenna Group International, a career transition firm in Milwaukee, Wis.

7. Take time to play.

Schedule an enjoyable event before beginning the next phase in your life. It can be something simple like visiting a botanical garden with your family, having friends over for a barbecue or pursuing an activity you never had time for. Consider a vacation if time allows. Even long leisurely weekends can provide opportunities to laugh, become energized and relax.

8. Recognize the value of friends.

Don't neglect friends and networking opportunities. This change may make you feel reclusive and want to retreat into a corner. But contact with and reassurance from others may be what you need most.

You may be surprised to discover that many others have been through similar experiences. Successful people often have experienced worse or more unsettling events than a job loss. Identify supportive people and maintain contact with them. Also keep up a routine that balances church, family and social obligations even if you don't feel like it.

9. Analyze your financial status.

Review your finances and take steps to become more secure in a time of transition. Determine how leaving a job and taking a new one will affect your retirement, 401 (k) and IRA plans. Double-check your health, disability and life insurance plans to ensure your family will be covered during the transition. If not, review your COBRA rights and other options so that unexpected medical bills won't disrupt your financial security.

10. Be open to new possibilities.

"Change always comes bearing gifts," says Dr. Pritchett. It's up to you to find them. Your job change can be an opportunity in disguise. Don't be so reluctant to embrace change that you can't see new opportunities that become available.

Starting over is part of career advancement in today's turbulent workplace. Successfully ending the final chapter of one job will give you a good start on the first chapter of a new one.