

The "Emotions" of a Counter Offer

You are considering a change because your present position and/or company does not offer the potential for growth you seek. You have looked at your decision to change both logically and emotionally, and it's the emotional decision that is the hardest. That old axiom, "don't let your heart rule your mind" is much easier to say than do. But the fact remains, your needs are not being satisfied! Sure, the company has helped you progress professionally; sure, you've made many new friends; and you probably feel comfortable because you can handle the job well. However, as certain as you're reading this, your objectives and goals are secondary to those of the company, and it will always remain that way. As soon as you thought about changing jobs, subconsciously you knew this was true.

Top executives agree that the days of the gold watch for 30 years of faithful service are gone. In fact, experience at several good companies is considered an asset because your horizons are expanded. Today, changing jobs is a necessity if you expect your career to grow.

CAVEAT: Your changes cannot be too frequent and you must be able to demonstrate that by making the change your background was enhanced.

CAVEAT: Don't resign until you have another position. Experience has shown it to be easier to find a job if you are presently employed.

Let's face it, it is natural to resist change and avoid disruption, and your present employment is no exception. If you're doing a good job your employer will not want to lose you, and you can expect a counter offer even though you have accepted a job elsewhere. So long as you haven't started your new position, the company and your boss are going to woo you. You'll be enticed with more money, or at least be promised, a promotion. The appeal will be emotional in nature. There will be an apology made in the form of not knowing of your dissatisfaction. Your boss may even enlist a senior vice president or the president to help convince you that you're making a mistake.

It is **guaranteed**, you will hear the following in some form or another:

1. "We have plans for you that will come to fruition the first of next month—it's my fault for not telling you."
2. "I shouldn't do this, but I'm going to let you in on some confidential information. We're in the process of reorganizing and it will mean a significant promotion for you within six months."
3. "We'll match your new offer and even better it by "x" percent. This raise was supposed to go into effect the first of next quarter anyway, but because of your fine record, we'll start it immediately."
4. "When I told our president of your decision, he told me he wants to have dinner with you and your wife/husband as soon as possible. You just tell me when, and he'll drop everything to discuss this situation with you."

Counteroffer Implications

A counter offer can be a very flattering experience: your emotions may be swayed; you may lose your objectivity; you are going to be tempted to stay; "buyer's remorse" will set in – that apprehension of change will urge you to reconsider your decision.

CAVEAT: Accept the counteroffer only if you can answer "no" to all the following:

1. Did I make the decision to seek other employment because I felt a new environment would provide me with the opportunity to enhance my career?
2. If I decided to stay after giving notice, will my loyalty be suspect and affect my chance for advancement in the future?
3. If my loyalty is questioned, is there the possibility that I will be an early layoff or terminated if business slows down?
4. The raise they're offering me to stay, is it just my annual review coming early?
5. The raise, I was offered, is above the guidelines for my job. Does this mean they are "buying time" until a replacement can be found within the acceptable compensation guidelines for my job?
6. I got the counter offer because I resigned. Will I always have to threaten to quit each time I want to advance?

Logic Must Prevail

As a professional, your career decisions must be made objectively; free of the emotional pressures you are likely to experience. Others will try to influence you, but sometimes only you know things are not right and will not get better. How do you explain a "gut feeling?" Are you expecting your company to be sorry to see you leave and to make some attempt to keep you. Their response should be considered flattering but it's beset with pitfalls too numerous to risk.

It's up to you to end your relationship as professionally as you began it. Write a letter that expresses your thanks for the opportunity they extended and tell them you enjoyed your relationship, but that your decision is irrevocable. Put it in your own words and either mail it personally or hand it to your immediate supervisor. Be pleasant but firm. Your new employer is anxious to have you start, so remember, two to four week's notice is almost always sufficient.

A counter offer is really a belated confirmation of the contributions you've made. Move ahead to your new job knowing you've made the right decision. After all, if you don't look after your future, who will?