
How to decide about accepting a counter offer and resigning

Should I stay or should I go?

- The dilemma of changing your job can be a difficult one. You weigh up the benefits and concerns and eventually, make the decision to move on from your current job.
- You find your perfect job, successfully pass several interviews and/or assessments and finally receive a well-deserved offer of employment.
- Finally, you pluck up the courage to hand in your letter of resignation to your current line manager.
- Once done, you feel greatly relieved and start looking forward to starting your exciting new career.
- Then your line manager throws a spanner in the works by making an unexpected counter offer.

Understanding the Counter Offer

If you are a valued employee, then your current company will clearly not want to lose your services. Counter offers are common place and many employers are likely to propose a competitive alternative offer to keep good employees. It is a flattering incentive designed to tempt you into changing your mind. As tempting and ego-gratifying as it may be, accepting a counter offer could be a costly career mistake.

The Hidden Agenda

In order to keep you in the company, your current employer may offer a broad range of counter benefits, from increasing basic salary or commission to attractive promotional positions. And often, there are truly humane reasons for these counter offers. But it is most likely that there are also numerous hidden agendas:

- Replacing an employee can be expensive.
- It might mess up their budget to re-recruit that time of year.
- They have no time to re-recruit right now.
- They want you to finish the project you're working on.
- They don't have the time or budget to train someone new at the moment.
- Losing staff may be perceived as a negative reflection on the company, or management.
- Your leaving might constitute a threat to them in terms of the current customer relationships you have, especially if you are joining a competitor. The counter offer minimises their risk by keeping your business relationships intact.

Don't surrender!

Before you let the flattery of a counter offer tempt you, consider the real reasons you're wavering on that exciting new career.

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Don't jeopardise your future

- A counter offer may sweeten the deal in the short term. But remember your reasons for wanting to leave in the first place. If you were really in-line for a promotion, or about to be given extra benefits for your hard work and commitment, **why did they wait until you resigned, to offer you what you're really worth to them?**
- A new title or benefits will not necessarily compensate for a lack of interesting assignments. Your future starts now – which is why you were looking for a new job and to further your career.

Why not accept the cash?

- More money may make you happy in the short term. But accepting a pay rise in order to stay may simply appear to your employer that you were attempting to use your job for financial gain.
- Studies show that 89% of those that accept a counter offer, leave the company within 12 months anyway.
- **Money cannot buy you job satisfaction.**
- You were probably offered an increase to join the new company anyway. But also think about the career prospects and other qualities that attracted you to the role in the first place.

Think about your reputation!

- No matter what the company may say, in future you are likely to be considered a loyalty risk. Having once demonstrated your 'lack of loyalty' by having looked for another job, you will lose your status as a "team player" and your place in the inner circle.
- Some 'jilted' companies have long memories and believe that even if you decide to stay, statistically you are almost certain to leave them again. You will always be suspected of attending a job interview whenever you are absent. The counter offer, therefore, is usually nothing more than a stalling device to keep you around until your employer can quietly find a cheaper or more dedicated replacement for you.
- Job offers work in two directions – It's about both the employee and employer. If you reject a company's offer in favour of a counter offer you have effectively wasted their time, money and abused their trust. They are unlikely to consider applications from you in future, and in closed industries where reputation counts this will certainly damage your personal brand.

What about the company's reputation?

- For very good reasons, well-managed companies don't ever make counter offers.
- They believe their policies are fair and equitable and will not be subjected to what they see as being blackmailed by 'counteroffer coercion'.

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What about your relationships with colleagues?

- Accepting a counter offer after you've made the decision to leave will probably weaken your relationships and decrease the trust your colleagues and superiors have in you.
- In their eyes, you could be off again at the next opportunity, or when things aren't going your way. It can be seen as an attempt at forcing your hand to get a better deal.
- If your colleagues really are your friends, you will remain in contact long after you have left, and avoid straining your friendships through tense environments at work. It will be so much better to chat about how excited you are in your new role, than go over for the 20th time, your reasons for disliking your current job.

Be prepared

- Rejecting a counter offer can possibly further alienate you from the company.
- Your goal should be to resign in a manner that avoids a counter offer from ever being made in the first place.
- Acting with the courage of your conviction will create a positive impression for you, and will most likely generate respect in what can possibly be a difficult situation

Be clear

- Be sure to state in unmistakable terms that your decision is final. A less direct approach such as muttering something that sounds like, "I'm thinking of changing jobs" or "I'm leaving for more money" is likely to leave the embarrassing impression that what you are really doing is attempting to use your job to gain extra allowances.

Write your resignation letter

- To eliminate any possible misunderstanding, always submit your resignation in writing. Your written letter should be brief and should contain a clear-cut statement of resignation, an expression of thanks for the professional association you have enjoyed, a final date of employment, and a cooperative statement expressing your willingness to help during the transition period prior to your last day of work.

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Handle the response with maturity, for your own sake

- If anything is said that even sounds like a lead into a counter offer, re-iterate that you have now made the commitment to join another company. Be sure to let your employer know that you are prepared to offer a full business handover, and ask if there is anything else you can do to make the transition easier.
- Be prepared for any kind of reaction, ranging from congratulatory handshakes to guilt trips to out-and-out anger. Regardless of the company's reaction, your plan is to remain calm and professional. You have done nothing wrong and do not have to answer attacks like, "How could you do this to us?" or any other hostile accusations.
- It is imperative that you handle your part of the resignation meeting in a courteous and professional manner. The kind of character reference the company will give you in the future will be strongly influenced by the impression you left behind when you resigned.
- Act with the courage of your conviction. If you are coerced financially into accepting a counter offer, your true reasons for wanting to leave will not be dealt with and you are likely to end up being even more dissatisfied. Except by then, the company who had made you this offer will be very unlikely to reconsider you and you will have to start all over again, with no guarantees of finding a similar offer.

Consider the manner of your departure

- Your current employer is likely to want to ask why are leaving. As satisfying as it may be to "unload" about your manager's failings or the company's problems, it is never a good idea. No company has ever changed as the result of a "disgruntled quitter" generously informing them of their misdeeds. Nothing is accomplished except leaving behind a bad impression about your lack of professionalism. Remember, nothing is wrong. You simply have made a commitment to join another business.
- Remember also that your colleagues will be curious about why you are leaving. Whether they corner you at work or call you at home, tell them exactly what you told the company. Anything you say will get back, and 'sour-grapes' comments can be used to make your colleagues look loyal whilst making you look like a liar.
- It is always better to leave in a positive situation, both for yourself and your employer. Life works in mysterious ways and you never know when your paths may cross again.

Keep your pace up

- Do not underestimate the importance of your performance during your last two weeks. Don't allow yourself to become 'mentally unemployed' and de-motivated whilst working out your notice. Give it your very best effort right up until the last minute you're there. You will never be sorry you did, and you can be sure of a good reference to take with you.

Good luck!

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