

## How to resign

---

### Introduction

Resigning is rarely a comfortable time, and most of us don't have to do it too often. In many respects it is similar to going through a divorce, so be assured that those feelings that you might have in the pit of your stomach over facing your boss are quite normal. But there is an art to making sure that it is as positive and stress-free a process as possible.

The way in which you resign specifically underlines to all parties the level of commitment you have just made to your new employer. Many candidates resign poorly leaving the door open to counter-offer measures imposed by the current employer.

Remember, you are making a significant move – there are bound to be fears, uncertainties and unknowns. This is why you may find the notice period a particularly vulnerable time. You just need to remember why you wanted to leave in the first place, and what was exciting enough to make you say yes to your new employer.

Follow these simple steps and your resignation will be a straight forward, low-stress process. And remember that we are on hand if you ever need a strengthening chat!

### The resignation letter

It is imperative that this letter is direct, to the point and without embellishment. Here is a suggested letter which we have found quite appropriate:

Dear John,  
Please accept this letter as my official notice of resignation. I have made a commitment to another organisation and will start with them in four weeks (*or whatever your contractual notice dictates*). Naturally, that it is my intention to work with you and my team members to make this transition as smooth as possible.

I would like to leave on a positive and professional note and I welcome your thoughts on how we can best accomplish this. Once you have written your resignation letter, arrange a brief meeting with your superior.

### The Meeting

Call your boss and schedule a 5-10 minute meeting. The purpose of the meeting is professional but a private matter.

You set the agenda with your boss. You must be positive and professional. This will not be a time for idle conversation, progress updates or a chance for your employer to find out what it will take to keep you on board. Nor is it a time for you to complain or pass opinions on the company or your colleagues. This is simply the time when you inform your employer of your decision and commitment to make a career move.

The only purpose of the meeting is to discuss how to make the transition a positive one. Open the meeting by saying "John, this is my letter of resignation. I'd like you to read it before we discuss how we can make a proper transition." Be prepared to outline your plan for the transition, especially as it relates to the start date at your new firm.

## Emotional Control

If all the above sounds a little distant and clinical, that is because you need to create this distance to achieve a clean and stress-free transition. It may well be that you get on very well with your boss, and that some of your colleagues will be very sad to see you go – but try and leave any of these matters until after you've actually left.

Do not approach your boss with the mentality of apologising. The “I'm sorry” or “I'm thankful for everything we've been able to do together” routines are dangerous and open the discussion up to emotional issues. You must set these aside and be in control. If your employer begins to ask a lot of “why” or “how” questions state that you'll be happy to address these questions perhaps in a couple of months after you're settled into the new role.

The moment you resign you upset the balance in the relationship with your boss and create an entirely new situation. Your current boss is used to dealing with you as an employee, now you're taking control. And once this balance is upset it can never be fully restored – with your boss or your colleagues.

You are no longer, from the moment of resignation, his/her subordinate and there just might be a battle for who controls your career. Who knows what's better for you and your career, you or your boss? Are you going to control your career or is he/she? An interesting consideration is that should your employer persist with questions or dialogue regarding your decision what he/she is actually telling you in the sub text is that “I don't believe you're capable of making this decision and I'll make it for you.”

The more your firm throws at you to keep you, the more concerned you should be because it could be an indicator that things in your firm are seriously wrong. Or it may be that they genuinely do value you more than perhaps they had shown – so why wait till you resign to show it? But most importantly research shows that the vast majority of people ‘bought back’ have left their company anyway within 12 months.

When is the best time to give notice? Usually at the end of the week and late in the afternoon. This usually minimises your employer's opportunity to spend the requisite time to develop a counter-offer.

Your current employer does not have a need to know where you'll be working after you leave. In the event of competition issues, assure your employer that you do not intend to break your contract and that you will disclose the name of your new employer when you have settled into your new role. This can often be a way for managers to angle themselves into a counter-offer discussion by informing you of all the “wrong” things with your new organisation. This reinforces the notion that they don't really believe you are capable of making a sound decision on your own, and is probably one of the reasons you decided to make the change in the first place.

The point of the meeting is to discuss how to make the transition as smooth as possible for everyone involved. It is not a meeting to debate the merits of the decision you have already made in your own best interest.

### What To Expect From Your Boss

Some of you will agonise over this meeting. Others will move through it with ease. In either case you need to be prepared.

Employers have only a few possible reactions to your resignation;

- “Clear your desk and leave!”

The ‘bin-liner’ approach is quite common in sensitive or highly competitive positions. You may well be forewarned of this if you’ve seen previous resignees escorted from the premises. If you think it might happen to you, it might be a good plan to whittle down gradually and unnoticeably the amount of personal possessions on your desk or in your drawers. This makes the (often somewhat humiliating) business of packing your things to leave much quicker.

- “How can you do this to me, the company, after all we’ve been through together?”

An entirely emotional approach. You’ve made the decision based on your own best interests. Usually best to park this discussion – “I’d be happy to talk to you more after I’ve established myself in my new role.” 99 times out of 2100 this consequent conversation will actually never happen.

- “How can you do this to the client, and when you know we’re so backlogged?!”

This says more about an organisation’s lack of planning and disorganisation and has nothing to do with you.

- “Come on, you can’t be serious, what’s it going to take to keep you?”

Be firm. “I’ve thought long and hard and my decision is made and is non-negotiable.”

- “I understand, I accept your resignation and want to work out a smooth transition.”

Excellent! Although perversely you may feel personally a bit miffed he/she isn’t more upset...

Whatever their reaction, take confidence in knowing that you have been well prepared both emotionally and professionally. Having realistic expectations of the resignation meeting, the possible reactions from your boss and the appropriate positioning of your resignation itself, you’ll be able to maintain control of your career. And it may well be that you already know how resignations are handled/accepted from previous colleagues’ departures.

Finally, build bridges, don’t burn them – you may well come across your co-workers in the future. So don’t indulge in character assassination during your notice period or at your leaving do (which, incidentally, is always better once you’ve actually left). Stay sober, shake hands warmly with everyone and remember to leave smiling.

You may be offered an exit interview. Some people view these as an opportunity to ‘get even’. Don’t! The best thing to do is to decline the offer – you can’t fix what was broken. If you do decide to take the interview you must resist the temptation to list negatives from the past as your reason for going – instead focus on the positive opportunity you are going to.

I would like to recognise Mike Goldman, CPC of Strategic Associates, INC. and Jeff Skrentny CPC, CTS of The Jefferson Group for their extensive work in the area of resignations and counter-offers.