

All Candidates please read carefully.



The Counter-Offer

Counter-offers are almost always counterproductive for your career. I'm not talking about the give-and-take involved in a salary negotiation. I mean the kind of counter-offer you might get when you announce you're resigning to take another job. Sure, it's an ego boost, but a backhanded one, when you think about it. If you were so valuable all along, how come you had to quit to get your employer to recognize it? The simple answer is that most companies don't have to be proactive in this labour market. They can coast because the demand for talent isn't that hot and there are lots of unemployed people out there. No need to spend extra money unless the company is forced to do it. That must be the case because they've made you a counter-offer. It looks like you're in the driver's seat now. But you're not. You just think you are.

What's Wrong With This Picture?

If you take a counter-offer, and then kick back, it's likely that you'll be kicked out. The reason that most companies make counter-offers is so that they – rather than you – are in control of the timetable for transition. When someone resigns, the general rule is a two week notice period (a month or longer for those in management roles). That means the company's got to scramble to find a substitute for the mission-critical role you've been filling. Odds are, it's going to take longer than that to find a candidate who's going to be a good fit. That's why they'll give you more to stay around. While you're basking in the satisfaction of getting more money and/or a better title, your boss is reviewing resumes and taking time to interview replacements. When she finds that special someone, you'll be history. It's a nasty surprise for the unaware.

The Worst That Can Happen

You might think that being eliminated would be the worst thing that can happen if you take a counter-offer, but you'd be wrong. The worst thing is that you stay, and are – from now on – untrustworthy. Or disloyal. Or an extortionist. It depends on the way your boss shades your actions. The end result is, no matter how you behave in the future, you'll always be regarded with suspicion. You've already shown that you're ready to leave, so management will be waiting for you to do it again. You'll be at the bottom of the list for promotions and good assignments. Training? Hah! Why would a company invest in someone whose longevity is questionable? You'll also be subject to some "Me Too" fears. No matter how discreetly the counter-offer situation is handled, there's always the possibility that news will leak out. Don't be surprised if you're increasingly cut off from co-workers. Management doesn't want your peers to get the idea that they can wring some more out of the company by copying you.

Want to Up Size That?

Before you grab a counter-offer, it's important to think about what's being offered and what actually brought you to the point of leaving in the first place. A counter-offer is almost always about money. The reasons people leave are almost never about money alone. The reasons people leave are money and something else. Or more commonly, something else and maybe money too. Where's the something else in this counter-offer? An extra few thousand per year doesn't change the 60-hour work week and insane deadlines. It doesn't release you from the boss who doesn't make decisions and lack of upward mobility. It doesn't shorten your killer commute. You won't have to wait for the glow to wear off to be back where you started ... because you never left. How long will it be until you're job hunting again? It doesn't matter whether they let you go or you let them go. The stress of the search will be the same again. And you won't have as much energy for the hunt next time around. If you pass on the job offer in hand right now, what's the cost of finding the next one? Will you have to pay sooner ... or later?

Better Safe Than Sorry

Yeah, I know. What if the new job doesn't work out? What if it's no better than the job you're leaving? Better the devil you know than the devil you don't know. Who knows? It's just as likely to be a good change as a bad change. At first, it may be hard to tell which was the safe alternative and which was the sorry one. Over time, you'll get some perspective. And, even if it's not for the better, for the first months, at least it's different. You'll have the opportunity to look back at your old situation and decide whether it was really as hard as you thought while you were there. Your former employer gets the same opportunity, assuming that you handled your exit gracefully. A respectful refusal to a counter-offer can leave the door open for an eventual return. All parties can benefit from a hiatus. I've heard from lots of folks who've left employers and then come back. These days, it's very acceptable to leave and return later with a higher profile. The skills and experience you gain with another

company can make you more valuable than if you had stayed. Plus, you have a better negotiating position, knowing what the culture and environment of your former company were. You may be able to bargain for better working conditions or a more favourable reporting structure in addition to the compensation and title you want.

Leaving Gracefully

But first you have to handle your exit properly. It's a delicate process to extract yourself with your reputation and relationships intact when a counter-offer is on the table. And regardless of whether you intend to return, you do want to preserve the company's respect for you. That means you take the time to consider their proposal, even if you have no intention of taking it. No matter how cheesy that offer is, make it look like you have to sleep on it. Tell the manager who offers the deal that you'll need a day or two to think it over.

Use that time to plan your response. You'll need to be gracious, definite and concise. Something like this:

"Name of the Manager, I really appreciate this offer. It's gratifying to know that Name of Company values me so highly. I feel the same about my experience here, but this other position is an opportunity that I can't just pass up. I'm sad to be leaving all my colleagues here, but this is the right time for the right next step for my career. How can we use the two weeks before I leave in the most productive way? I've jotted down some ideas, and thought that we should get together to plan, maybe later today or tomorrow. I want to be as helpful as I can be during this change."

Don't get caught up in a discussion of where you're going and what makes this opportunity so much better than your current job. Politely refuse to discuss it by saying that you want to focus on an orderly transition. Keep saying it, if you have to, until you make your point.

More

After you've rejected a counter-offer, another one may come your way. Your manager may propose a short-term extension for your exit date. If you're willing and the start date for your new job is flexible, this may be a good way to offset any residual bad feeling. If you agree to this, be sure to set down in writing what the conditions of this extension are. It may be an amendment to your original resignation notice (which also should be in writing), or a separate document. It should contain the dates and details for the extension, including work hours, compensation and responsibilities. It's really a mini-contract, so be sure to get it signed by the manager before you go ahead with it.

Top 10 Reasons to Reject a Counter Offer

1. What type of company do you work for if you have to threaten to resign before they give you fair market value for your skills?
2. Where is the money for the counter offer coming from? Is it your next raise early? (All companies have strict wage and salary guidelines which must be followed.)
3. Your company will start looking for a new person at a lower salary price, immediately. The wheels are in motion to replace you ASAP.
4. You have now made your employer aware that you are unhappy. From this day on, your loyalty will always be in question.
5. When promotion time comes around, your employer will remember who was loyal, and who wasn't.
6. When times get tough, your employer will begin the cutback with you.
7. The same circumstances that now cause you to consider a change will repeat themselves in the future, even if you accept a counter offer.
8. Statistics show that if you accept a counter offer, the probability of voluntary leaving in six months or being let go within one year is extremely high. National statistics indicate that 89% accepting counter offers are gone in 6 months.
9. Accepting a counter offer is an insult to your intelligence and a blow to your personal pride, because you know that you were bought.
10. Once the word gets out, the relationship that you now enjoy with your co-workers will never be the same. You will lose peer group acceptance, and forever be that defector who was brought back