

Funny you should resign . . .

There's an art to resigning from a job, especially when faced with an apparently good counter-offer to make you stay, those offers of promotion and money may not be all they seem

Gone is the time of one job for life. Nowadays, company loyalty can be interpreted as insecurity, lack of ambition, self-deception or submission to the Peter Principle.

In an industry dictated by North American business ideals, the corporation's first loyalty is to its shareholders. If the only thing that keeps the share price healthy is off-loading employees in big numbers, that's what happens (as in 1991-1993). It is therefore quite understandable that many of today's employees take an open-market view of employment and are prepared to move on whenever the right opportunity comes along for enhancing their experience and increasing their market value.

This is particularly true of salespeople, whose typically enterprising mentality makes them more inclined than most other professions to focus on their own interests and take the risk of moving to another company when it suits them, often against the wishes of their employer. Very often, this is a sensible thing to do, but sometimes the decision to migrate their talents can be impetuous, spurred on by misunderstanding, unresolved grievances or pro-active recruiters.

It is therefore essential that any sales professional intending to leave their current job should first question the reasons for doing so. After all, what's the point of walking away from a pipeline of qualified business and starting all over again with cold sales prospects and unfamiliar colleagues in an unknown company for similar remuneration, if the grievances can be resolved?

In such an event-driver industry as computing, promises can easily be over-looked and apparently small matters neglected until they become major disasters. So, make your situation known to those who matter. If all you get in return are more empty promises and corporate platitudes, then you obviously have no option but to seek new pastures. But before you do so you must fully understand your reason for leaving and set it firmly in your mind.

Resigning is easy so long as you make it clear that your decision is irrevocable and has been reached as a result of careful consideration and nothing will change your mind. The less emphatic you are, the more problems you are likely to get by way of verbal coercion and what is known in the recruitment business as "counter-offers". Sometimes these represent sincere efforts to compensate for gross oversight or indecisiveness, but very often they are panic measures initiated by the sudden realisation of what is costs in time and money to lose a successful salesperson (and not so much the distress of seeing the individual leave). One could be forgiven for viewing such last ditch efforts with a degree of scepticism.

Where experience matters

Counter-offers can take a variety of forms.

- **Five dollars more.** A vacant sales territory, neglected customer, lost prospects and getting your replacement through the learning-curve is very expensive. Six figures isn't out of the question. So throwing money at the problem is easy to justify.

"Funny you should resign . . . we were just going to give you a rise." The company's sudden willingness to elevate your remuneration may come as a surprise, as may the replacement of your basic Cavalier by a BMW 528; but within the equation of potential revenue loss it's chicken feed. After all, it may only cost as long as it takes to replace you.

- **Empty promotion.** You always suspected you had potential for management; you may even have discussed your aspirations with your boss. But up to now you've been ignored or overlooked.

Suddenly you're promoted, just like that. Feels good, doesn't it. Your spouse is impressed and so are the guys at the club. But what does it really mean? Does it give you direct responsibility for other people? Have you received an increase in your income which suitably reflects your elevated status? Did they give you a Merc or a Jag? If such a promotion comes without real authority it is worse than no promotion at all, for your elevated title is likely to become a burden that could qualify you out when you apply for your next selling job.

When such sudden increases of fortune occur at your imminent departure you have to ask yourself the question: "Why wasn't I worth this before?"

- **Love, respect and other pressures.** For some strange reason, no-one ever got around to telling you how special and well liked you are to the company's plans for the future; but you're a key player now, destined for big things, everybody says so. You suspect your manager has had a personality transplant.
- **Guilt and disloyalty.** "How could you even think of leaving after all we've achieved together? You can't just throw it all away. You'd be breaking up the team. We'll be lost without you. Remember all the great times we've had together. The President's Club at Margate!"

From the outside looking in, it might seem fairly easy to discern the difference between sincere efforts to resolve a difficult problem and blatant expediency; but when you are the subject of such advances it's easy to lose your objectivity. Most people are ultimately vulnerable to flattery. The one thing you have to do throughout this persuasive process is to never lose sight of your original reason for leaving. Has that been resolved, and why now?

An item of interest for those who submit to the pressures of the counter-offer comes in the form of a survey carried by an American business journal some years ago, which revealed that around 60% of people accepting counter-offers were working for a different employer within nine months.