

# WHEN THINGS GO WRONG, SHOULD YOU QUIT OR WAIT TO GET FIRED?

HOW TO SPOT THE RED FLAGS THAT THINGS ARE GOING WRONG, AND THE STEPS YOU SHOULD TAKE

BY KELLY CLAY

Long gone are the days of working for the same company for decades—or even an entire decade. While many baby boomers are celebrating retirement from a company they dedicated their entire career to, many who entered their career within the past 10 to 15 years are already working for their second or third company.

The fact that gen-Xers and millennials are job hopping so much isn't about job loyalty. While those approaching retirement often think that the younger generations are "asking too much" from employers—such as more flexible schedules or benefits—the cause for this epic rise in discontentment is about the employers, not the employees.

As the country is beginning to rebound from one of the worst recessions in history, companies of all sizes are seeing cultures quickly shift and grow. Managers become executives who hire micromanagers to lead a growing team, while job descriptions applicants see rarely match real responsibilities. In today's world, constant change is part of work. Knowing when that means your job—or the future of the company—is on the line, and when it's time to look for a new job, is key to your career's future.

## THE RED FLAGS

Lisa Quast, a business consultant, career coach, and author of books including *Secrets of a Hiring Manager Turned Career Coach: A Foolproof Guide to Getting the Job You Want—Every Time*, explains, "There are lots of signs that can mean your job is on the line. Unfortunately, many people miss seeing the signs or don't want to believe the signs, even when they're blatant."

### Some of the red flags that you are about to get fired

1. A meeting request from your boss with no specific reason listed
2. A poor performance appraisal with a given a list of areas in which you need to improve by a specific date
3. Resources being pulled out from under you

As for the last point, Quast says, "This could include people who report to you being moved under another manager, projects you're leading being moved to other employees to lead, or even budget money for your team or projects being eliminated."

### Red flags that your company may go under

There are also some equally obvious signs that your company is on the verge of collapsing, indicating that your job is about to disappear. One of these red flags include management holding more closed-door meetings than usual and trying to reduce expenses. Lisa says, "This can be subtle at first, with actions such as limiting business travel, to reducing booth size at trade shows, to reducing advertising or marketing expenses/budgets."

A few other red flags that your company may be ready to shut the doors:

- Stressed-out management
- Reduction or elimination of employee benefits
- Several members of management resigning
- Finance-related issues such as missed financial targets for several quarters, extended payment terms, and failure to pay suppliers



## WHAT YOU SHOULD DO WHEN YOU SEE RED FLAGS

Quast explains that if you notice red flags that your company might be collapsing, start looking for other job opportunities, update your resume and all professional profiles (such as LinkedIn), and get proactive with your networking activities.

As Quast advises, "If you feel like your job is on the line, sit down with your boss and talk—the sooner the better. Before doing this, think through what you want to discuss by asking yourself: Why do I feel that my job is on the line? Has my work performance, quality of work, or productivity level declined? Has my behavior or attitude changed at work in any way?"

It's also critical to take the time to read through your last few performance appraisals and think about any and all feedback your manager has provided.

Quast explains that when you meet with your boss, you'll want to find out how he or she views your work. Does your manager see you as an underperformer, average performer or high performer? How does your performance compare to others within the department? What does your manager view as your strengths and weaknesses (or areas in which you could improve)?

Your main goal during this discussion is to obtain as much information as you can so you can find out what you can do to salvage your job. During the discussion, find out if there is a time frame for improvement, and what the next steps will be if your manager doesn't see improvement.

Even if you're seeing red, Quast strongly suggests sticking it out and not quitting your job, as it's easiest to find a new job when you already have a job. If you love your job, you may want to find ways to work better together with your manager—even if you don't like him or her. Because you never know when your manager will leave, be fired, or move to a job in another department, it can sometimes pay off to try and stick it out, instead of simply quitting.

## WHAT TO CONSIDER BEFORE QUITTING

Before making any decision to quit, or wait to get fired or be laid off, it's important to research each option so you understand the advantages and disadvantages of each choice. Quitting could keep your reputation intact and spare you the embarrassment of having to discuss the topic of being fired with potential employers.

If you know your company is being downsized and will be conducting layoffs, find out if the company offers a severance package and, if so, what is included, because getting laid off could be more helpful to you than quitting. Many employers provide severance packages as an act of goodwill during layoffs, but what's included differs for each company and depends on how long you've been employed and your employment level (non-management versus management versus executive level). You'll want to know what's included in it, such as a payout based on the number of weeks or months of service, health benefits, job search assistance, career counseling, training services, etc., and if the severance agreement requires anything of you (such as signing a non-compete agreement).

Before making any decisions on what to do, Quast advises it's best to fully understand your rights and options. You can do this by contacting a local labor and employment lawyer.

If you can identify with a few of the red flags above and aren't sure whether quitting or waiting to get fired or laid off is in your best interest, a discussion with a lawyer may be incredibly beneficial for the future of your career. Most offer a free consultation, and the time spent will be invaluable to make the right decision for your career, your bank account—and your sanity.

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