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How to quit: Jump ship professionally without going overboard

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By **Lora Shinn**
Special to NWJobs

Tonia Smalley wishes she had resigned differently.

One day, she dropped off her daughter at day care and then called her boss to quit. After 11 years in pharmaceutical sales, Smalley wanted to spend more time with her young daughter.

Her boss surprised her by asking brusquely: "Do you want to make today your last day?" Sure, Smalley stammered, without realizing the potential repercussions.

A few days later, Smalley (whose name has been changed upon request) was shut out of the computer system. She didn't have access to her sales statistics, HR information, contacts or insurance-claim information.

She realized how little she understood about the resignation process. "It's just like maternity leave," Smalley says. "You need to know your rights and investigate. Every company has little differences."

How you quit can have both short- and long-term effects on your career, says Lisa Quast, a Seattle-based certified executive coach and author of "Your Career, Your Way."

In fact, management-level employees might even think about giving more than two weeks' notice -- even up to 30 days -- so the company can find and train a replacement. "This allows you to leave the company with your head held high. [It shows] you did everything you could to leave on a positive note," Quast says.

It's important to think about when and how to tell your boss you're leaving, whether it's at the end of the day or after wrapping up a project, Quast says. When it's time to give notice, visit your manager in person with two copies of your resignation letter in hand -- one for your boss and one for the human resources department, Quast recommends.

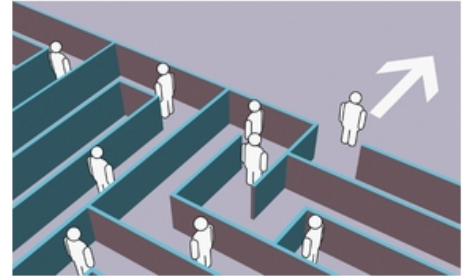
To lower stress and guilt around leaving co-workers and supervisors, create a project list that has the status of your current projects and a suggested transfer of duties, and bring it with you.

"This makes it much easier for the person to walk into the resignation meeting feeling like they have a grasp on all their activities," Quast says.

Response to a resignation can range from a counteroffer to an immediate dismissal.

When Samantha Barth, 36, was exploring a career change, she had to disclose her interview activity to her manager because of a vendor-client relationship between her current employer and the potential employer.

"I had to step carefully for several weeks," Barth says. She evaluated a counteroffer but decided to take the new job because it represented a shift into product management.



(Thinkstock)

Quitting don'ts

Tips from career expert Lisa Quast:

- Don't give less than two weeks' notice.
- Don't tell others at work that you're quitting before you tell your boss.
- Don't use job offers as leverage for getting a raise in your current position.
- Don't quit via email or text message.
- Don't burn bridges with anyone at the company you're leaving.

If you've accepted a position at a competing business, realize that your current employer might ask you to pack your things and leave immediately to make sure you don't take confidential materials or trade secrets.

"Prior to resigning, make sure you are ready to walk out the door," Quast says. Have all of your professional contacts, copies of HR documents and personal items at hand.

If you continue to work after your resignation, keep your professional wits about you. Don't perform new-hire duties on old-company time, and don't attempt to take customer lists or other confidential information, Quast recommends.

Barth avoided the "senioritis" that can afflict employees during her final two-week stretch. "I've seen people in their last two weeks become a completely different person," she says.

It was important to Barth to leave on a positive note, working hard and showing gratitude for years at a generous workplace. A positive focus only enhances workplace successes and preserves your reputation, she says.

"Next time I'm up for a job," Barth says, "I might well be judged based on how my desk looked when someone else took it over."

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