

CAREER TRANSITION PACKET



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Interviewing Information

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General Tips

- Know the time and place of the interview and the interviewer's full name and title.
- Ensure that you fully understand the job description of the position for which you are applying.
- Plan to be 15 minutes early in anticipation of traffic problems or other unanticipated delays. Also, know where you're going. If possible, acquaint yourself with the route. Late arrival for a job interview is never acceptable.
- Dress professionally (i.e. proper business attire)
- If presented with an application, fill it out neatly and completely.
- Be sure to shake the interviewer's hand firmly.
- Speak slowly and clearly. Don't rush your answers.
- Stress accomplishments.
- Be sure to answer every question fully and honestly.
- Don't jump ahead or give more information than it required. Pay attention to "cutoff" cues.
- Be sure you are consistent in your answers throughout all interviews.
- Don't answer with a simple "yes" or "no." Explain answers where possible.
- Avoid saying anything negative about present or previous employers or co-workers.
- Ask questions to show interest in the Company and the position.
- Be sure they know you are interested in the position; never close the door on an opportunity.
- Look alert and interested at all times and look the interviewer in the eye.
- Relax, smile, and have a positive attitude. Give the appearance of energy as you walk.

What to Prepare Beforehand

Chronological Outline of Career and Education

Breakdown your life into “segments” (i.e. university, first job, second job, etc.) For each segment, write down:

- A) why you went into the program or job
- B) what you did when you were there
- C) why you left

The chronology should flow logically and bring you to the present day. You should write down where you want to be in the short and long term and why it makes sense based on where you’ve been according to your chronology. Also, write down the reasons why you would be appropriate for the job you are interviewing for and why you are interested in the position.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths: Write down 3 technical and 3 non-technical personal strengths. For each strength, document something external that proves the strength is also perceived as others as a strength, i.e. you received a bonus in recognition, there were some savings achieved, you completed the implementation of a system, you met objectives, it was noted on your performance evaluation.

Weaknesses: The area of weaknesses is difficult. The way to answer any question about your weaknesses is to either:

- A) describe a weakness or area for development that you have worked on and have now overcome
- B) describe a characteristic that could be perceived as either a strength or a weakness

Questions to Ask

It is important to ask a lot of questions both throughout the interview and at the end of the interview when interviewers generally ask if you have any questions. Therefore, you should prepare a list of 5-10 technical and 5-10 non-technical questions and memorize them before the interview. Do not inquire about salary, vacation, bonuses, or other benefits.

Sample Questions

- Could you tell me about the growth plans and goals for the company/department/division?
- What needs to be accomplished in this position in the next 6-12 months?
- What skills are important to be successful in this position?
- Why did you join this company?
- What types of systems do you use throughout the company/department/division?
- Why is the position available?
- What made the previous person in this position successful/unsuccessful?
- To where have successful people in this position advanced?
- What criteria will my supervisor use for my performance evaluation and how frequently, and in what manner, will my supervisor and I meet?

- How do you (the supervisor) like to operate in terms of assignments, delegation of responsibility and authority, general operating style, etc.?
- what long - term problems and opportunities do you think my prospective area faces?
- With whom will I be interacting most frequently and what are their responsibilities and the nature of our interaction?
- what particular things about my background, experience, and style interest you?
- What experience, training, attributes, operating style, accomplishments, and personality factors should the “ideal” candidate for the job have?
- Is there anything in my background or experience to prevent you from considering me as a viable candidate?
- What else can I do to get a job offer from your company?
- What is the time frame for making a decision on this position?

Questions You Should Be Prepared For

- What do you know about our company?
- Why do you want to work here?
- Why are you looking to change positions?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What do you like most and least about your current position (or supervisor?)
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- What are the best and worst things your boss would say about you?
- Name 5 adjectives that would best describe you?
- What are your concerns in your current situation and what would you improve?
- How have you changed or improved the nature of your job?
- Why should we hire you?
- What can you do for us that someone else can't?
- Why did you choose this particular vocation?
- What contributions to profits have you made in your present or former positions to justify your salary level there?
- What do you think determines a person's progress in a good company?
- Behavioral Questions
 - Tell me about the time that you were most successful in dealing with a difficult client?
 - Give me an example of a time when you had to get something accomplished with someone whom is a bit more difficult to get along with

Answers to some Difficult Questions

How much money do you want?

–Only indicate what you are presently earning and that salary is one of several factors you are considering. Emphasize that the opportunity is the most important consideration.

Tell me about yourself.

–Emphasis on your recent experience is most important; however, brief coverage of previous experiences and education can also be useful.

What are some situations in which your work was criticized?

–Give only one or two examples and emphasize how you addressed the criticism and how it is now not a problem. Ensure that you show that you are open to constructive criticism.

What do you think of your boss?

–Create a positive image, even if this is not the case.

How long would it take you to make a meaningful contribution to our company?

–Realistically speaking, experience and requirements of the job will influence your making a meaningful contribution.

Why haven't you found the right position before now?

–Explain that finding the right job is more important than finding just a job. This can be a difficult task as the current economy may be a factor.

Why were you laid off?

–Be as positive as possible. Do not discuss interpersonal conflicts, regardless of how sympathetic the interviewer may seem. Discuss economic conditions. Do not go into much detail unless asked.

Why should we hire you? or Are you interested in this job?

–Explain why this is a logical position for you, sum up your work history and re-emphasize your strongest qualities and achievements. Above all, let the interviewer know that you will be an asset to the company.

Do Your Homework!

You should find out as much information on the Company and the interviewers as you can. The best sources are the public library, the Internet (you should check if the company has a home page) and your recruiter. If you get to your interview early, you should read any brochures they may have in the reception area. Another thing you may do is review any articles or books on interviewing.

Negative Factors Evaluated by an Interviewer

- Poor presentation
- Lack of a firm handshake
- Being unprepared for the interview, i.e. little or no knowledge of the company
- Poor expression of thoughts, including incorrect grammar
- Not asking questions about the job
- “Superiority complexes” and “know it all” attitudes
- Indifferences or lack of enthusiasm
- Being evasive, nervous, and lacking in confidence
- Lack of career direction – undefined goals or purposes
- Candidate is too interested in compensation factors
- Overaggressive, overbearing, or conceited behavior
- Speaking unfavorably of previous employers
- Lack of courtesy and maturity
- No appreciation for the value of experience
- Not looking the interviewer in the eye

Closing the Interview

- If you are interested in the position, ask for it or ask for the next interview if the situation demands. You might say something like, “Mr./Mrs. Employer, I am very impressed with what I’ve seen and heard here today and am confident that I could do an excellent job in the position you’ve described to me. When might you be in a position to make an offer?” Your enthusiasm should make a favorable impression.
- If you are made an offer, accept it only if you are ready. You don’t have to accept the offer on the spot.
- Don’t be discouraged if no definite offer is made or specific salary is discussed. The interviewer will probably want to communicate with CP Paragon Solutions, L.P. first or interview more applicants before making a decision.
- Thank the interviewer for his time and consideration. If you have answered the two major questions in his mind: (1) “Why are you interested in the company?” and (2) “What can you offer?” you have done all you can.

The Do's and Don'ts of Interviewing

What you should do before the interview:

a. Research the company.

Research the company with whom you are interviewing. Nothing impresses an interviewer more than a candidate that knows about the company. It shows that you have initiative.

b. Be punctual.

Get there on time. The importance of punctuality cannot be stressed enough. Plan to arrive about 15 minutes early. It shows your regard for the interviewer's time. If you have to wait, use the time to go over your notes.

c. Dress Professionally.

It shows that you cared enough about the interviewer and the company to present yourself in a professional manner. In today's work place, most companies do not have a strict code. So if you are one who hates pantyhose or a shirt and tie, relax. This may be the only time you have to do so.

d. Practice. Practice. Practice.

Practice makes perfect. All the information that you would have obtained about successful interviewing would be wasted if you do not practice. You can know all the questions the interviewer will ask but if you do not practice, it would be as if you did not. Have a friend go over the questions with you until you are able to answer them promptly without stuttering.

What you should do during the interview:

a. Give the interviewer a firm handshake.

Give the interviewer a firm handshake, even if the interviewer is a woman and you are man. Nobody likes a limp handshake but by the same token do not take the person's hand off either. While shaking, introduce yourself keeping eye contact at all times .

b. Smile.

Nothing is worse than an interviewee who looks depressed or indifferent. Would you want to work with someone who is always depressed?

c. Maintain Eye Contact at all times.

You are confident about yourself and your capabilities. Relay that. Do not stare out of the window or fiddle with your pencil. The interviewer is talking to you or you to him. Be attentive.

d. Speak Clearly.

Do not mumble your words. It portrays a lack of confidence.

e. Respond to your interviewer.

If he makes a joke, smile to acknowledge that he made one, even if it was not funny.

f. Listen before you answer questions.

Make sure you have understood the question. If you do not, ask him to clarify it. Take a second, then answer.

g. Give brief answers.

Answer promptly and intelligently. However, when asked yes or no questions, elaborate.

h. Complete the application thoroughly.

For salary requirements put negotiable, unless specified not to do so. Then put the salary range for your profession with your experience.

i. Ask the interviewer questions.

Even if he does not ask you "Do you have any questions," ask him anyway.

j. Thank the interviewer.

Be sure to thank the interviewer for his time.

What you should do after the interview:

a. Thank the interviewer in writing.

Send the interviewer a formal thank you

What you should not do at all:

It may be obvious to some that most of the things you should not do are the opposite of what you should. However, some people need reinforcing.

a. Be dishonest.

If an employer asks "Do you know about?", and you do not, say "No". If you say yes, the next question is almost always "Tell me about it."

b. Chew gum during the interview.

It's tacky and inappropriate. I would recommend that you do not before the interview either. You may forget to remove it.

c. Smoke.

Do not smoke, even if the interviewer does and offers you a cigarette.

d. Refuse a job offer in the interview.

Don't ever refuse a job offer until you have had the time to think about it. It may be the only one you get.

e. Ramble.

Make sure your answers are short and to the point.

Most Frequently Asked Questions

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your team-player qualities? Give examples.
- Of the courses you have had at college which courses have you enjoyed the most?
- What is your GPA? How do you feel about it? Does it reflect your abilities?
- How have your educational and work experiences prepared you for this position?
- What work experiences have been most valuable to you and why?
- What have the experiences on your resume taught you about managing and working with people?
- Of the hobbies and interests listed on your resume what is your favorite and tell me why?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What goals have you set for yourself? How are you planning to achieve them?
- To what do you owe your present success?
- Why should I hire you?
- What makes you think you can handle this position?
- What is your most significant accomplishment to date?
- Why do you want to work here?
- Describe a leadership role of yours and tell why you committed your time to it.
- In a particular leadership role you had, what was your greatest challenge?
- Give me an example of an idea that has come to you and what you did with it?
- Give me an example of a problem you solved and the process you used?
- Give me an example of the most creative project that you have worked on.
- Tell me about a project you initiated?
- Describe the project or situation that best demonstrates your analytical abilities?
- Since attending college, what is the toughest decision that you have had to make?
- Tell me about your most difficult decision and how did you go about making it?
- What types of situations put you under pressure, and how do you deal with pressure?
- Give me a situation in which you failed, and how you handled it?
- Why are you interested in our organization?
- What type of position are you seeking?
- Where do you think your interest in this career comes from?
- What industry besides this one are you looking into?

- Why have you chosen this particular profession?
- What interests you about this job?
- What challenges are you looking for in a position?
- What can you contribute to this company?
- What motivates you?
- What turns you off?
- If I asked the people who know you well to describe you, what three words would they use?
- If I asked the people who know you for one reason why I shouldn't hire you what would they say?
- When you take on a project do you like to attack the project in a group or individually?
- Describe the type of manager you prefer.
- Tell me about a team project of which you are particularly proud and your contribution?
- Describe a situation where you had to work with someone who was difficult, how did you handle it?
- What type of work environment appeals to you most?
- With which other companies are you interviewing?
- What characteristics do you think are important for this position?
- Why do you feel that this company will be a career for you rather than a job?
- Name two management skills that you think you have?
- What characteristics are most important in a good manager? How have you displayed one of them?
- Why did you choose this college and how did you arrive at this decision?
- What factors did you consider in choosing your major?
- Describe how your favorite course has contributed your career interests?
- Since you have been at college, what is it that you are proudest of?
- How have you changed personally since starting college?
- What has been your greatest challenge?
- If you could change a decision you made while at college what would you change and why?
- Why did you choose the campus involvements you did? What did you gain? What did you contribute?

Questions You Can Ask the Interviewer

Ask about the information you researched.

Describe my job duties.

Is this a newly created position?

What are the companies short and long term goals?

What do you like most about working for this company?

What is a typical day like for you?

To whom would I report?

Who will I supervise?

Tell me about the training program I will experience.

What is the company's promotional policy?

With whom will I be working most closely?

When can I expect to hear from you?

34 Common Mistakes

1. Poor personal appearance.
2. Lack of interest and enthusiasm: Passive and indifferent.
3. Over emphasis on money: interested only in best dollar offer.
4. Condemnation of past employers.
5. Failure to look at the interviewer when conversing.
6. Limp, fishy handshake.
7. Unwillingness to go where sent.
8. Late to interview.
9. Failure to express appreciation for interviewer's time.
10. Asks no questions about job.
11. Indefinite response to questions.
12. Overbearing, over aggressive, conceited with superiority or "know it all complex."
13. Inability to express self clearly: Poor voice diction, grammar.
14. Lack of planning for career: no purpose and goals.
15. Lack of confidence and poise: nervous ill at ease.
16. Failure to participate in activities.
17. Unwilling to start at the bottom-expects too much too soon.
18. Makes excuses, evasive, hedges on unfavorable factors in record.
19. Lack of tact
20. Lack of courtesy: ill mannered.
21. Lack of Maturity
22. Lack of vitality.
23. Indecision.
24. Sloppy application form.
25. Merely shopping around.
26. Wants job for short time.
27. No interest in company or industry.
28. Low moral standards.
29. Cynical.
30. Lazy.
31. Intolerant: strong prejudices.
32. Narrow interests.
33. Inability to take criticism.
34. High pressure type.

After the Interview

The first thing you should do is call CP Paragon Solutions, L.P. and let them know how the interview went and whether you are still interested in the position. At the same time, your recruiter will be determining the client feedback. The next thing you should do is send a thank you letter to your interviewer.

Sample Thank You Letter

(Interviewer Name)
(Title)
(Company Name)
(Address)
(City, State, Zip)

Dear (Interviewer):

Thank you for the opportunity to interview with you. Our discussion about the position and (Company Name) confirmed my desire for employment with your firm. I was impressed with (Company Name) and the opportunity we discussed, as well as everyone to whom I spoke.

I believe my skills and experience will be an asset to your firm. Furthermore, I feel my work ethic and dedication will allow me to excel in any position for which you feel I am qualified.

Thank you again for taking the time to meet with me and allowing me the chance to learn more about (Company name). I would welcome the opportunity to work for your firm. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

(Name)

10 *Reasons For Not Accepting a Counteroffer*

- You have now made your employer aware that you are unhappy. From this day on, your loyalty will always be in question.
- When promotion time comes around, your employer will remember who is loyal and who is not.
- When times get tough, your employer will begin the cutbacks with you.
- Accepting a counteroffer is an insult to your intelligence and a blow to your personal pride; you were bought.
- Where is the money for the counteroffer coming from? All companies have wage and salary guidelines, which must be followed. Is it your next raise paid early?
- Your company will immediately start looking for a new person at a cheaper price.
- The same circumstances that now cause you to consider a change will repeat themselves in the future, even if you accept a counteroffer.
- Statistics show that if you accept a counteroffer, the probability of voluntarily leaving in six months or being let go in one year is extremely high.
- Once the word gets out, the relationship that you now enjoy with your co-workers will never be the same. You will lose the personal satisfaction of peer group acceptance.
- What type of company do you work for if you have to threaten to resign before they will give you what you are worth?

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RESIGNATION

RESIGNATION

Sooner or later, most of us face a resignation. Resigning is never easy, especially when you've worked at a position for several years, and have become part of a team. Some employers and coworkers take it personally and accuse you of abandoning ship. However, handling your resignation as professionally and thoughtfully as you handle your search for a new job can help make your resignation relatively smooth and amicable.

KEEP RESIGNATIONS SHORT, SIMPLE AND POSITIVE

- Leave your employer on a positive note. Your moving on does not have to be a time for long faces. After all, you have just won an opportunity to advance, an opportunity for which you owe your employer sincere thanks. Thank your colleagues, too, for their help in preparing you to move onward and upward.
- If you have given your best to the job, you will be missed - especially by those inconvenienced by your leaving! Let them know that you intend to assist them in whatever ways you can. By showing your boss and firm due respect, you encourage future support you may someday need.
- When you resign, keep your conversations simple and concise. The more you say, the more questions you may have to answer. Avoid lengthy discussion about your new opportunity with your old employer. Typically, your resignation creates extra work for others.
- Chances are, your boss will be caught off-guard by your resignation, and will not be able to listen clearly to your explanations due to concerns about the sudden challenge your leaving presents. Because your boss is losing a valued employee and your leaving may create more work for him, he or she may express negative opinions about your new firm or position. This will only confuse you. You may find yourself having to justify your personal goals and decisions or absorb the personal frustrations of others. If you're dealing with volatile or vindictive personalities, it may be best to avoid revealing where you will be going.
- If you feel you may face a hostile atmosphere, resign at the end of your workday so that you are no longer on company time and are in control of your schedule. Try to schedule any discussions for the following morning when everyone can face your departure after time to absorb and reflect on the news. If you have to defend yourself at this first meeting, or if things begin to get out of control, ask to re-schedule the meeting for a more appropriate time.

THE ORAL RESIGNATION

- Resigning orally may place you in the compromising position of having to explain your decision on the spot. Words are powerfully charged when you reveal a decision, which has such an impact on your organization. Choose your words with care. Your boss may want to probe for factors, which led to your decision. You may be asked who or what is the reason for your leaving, or may be invited to offer suggestions to help make the organization more effective. If you have had a close relationship with your boss, you may feel obliged to answer candidly.
- Don't fall for this trap! Use your head and discuss personal, heartfelt matters outside the office. Remember, your interrogator is still your boss. Whatever you say will be viewed as biased - after all, you have severed your relationship with your organization - and may eventually be used against you. At this point you are no longer considered a team player, nor viewed as having the company's best interest at heart.
- Too often, resigning employees come to regret their comments when they are misinterpreted or exaggerated in the re-telling. Constructive criticism is no longer your responsibility, and carries a high cost, which could jeopardize your good references.
- Instead, offer sincere praise for the firm and those with whom you worked. Prepare yourself beforehand by focusing on several positive aspects of your workplace, and mention them liberally when the opportunity arises. Even if favorite aspects were, say, the great lunches, or humorous stories told over coffee, better to mention such things than to harp on disappointments or shortcomings. (These, you are addressing by moving on to greener pastures.) You want to be perceived as a positive, constructive individual in forward motion. People will remember your last impression. Make it your best performance. You may want to tell your boss something like:
- "I need to discuss something with you if you have a moment. I've been made an exceptional offer by another firm, and I've decided to accept it. My wife and I have given this opportunity a lot of thought. As much as I'd like to advance within this company, we feel the new opportunity is in our best long-term interest.
- We deeply appreciate all you and the firm have done for me here. I don't think I would have been presented this exceptional opportunity if not for your support and leadership. I want to thank you. I hope I can leave with your good wishes. You've been a friend as well as a boss."
- If probed for more information, you may want to claim that there is nothing else to say right now. Simply communicate that you are leaving a good opportunity for an even better one, which suits your aspirations.

THE WRITTEN RESIGNATION

- **Written resignations give you the time to effectively prepare what you wish to communicate, and give you greater control over your delivery of the message. You can't be thrown off-track by an unexpected remark as can happen during a confrontational conversation. A written resignation also reinforces the fact that you are really leaving and are not simply threatening in order to re-negotiate your position. Also, there is something permanent about the written word, which often circumvents interrogation.**
- **Under no circumstance should you state any dissatisfactions with the firm or individuals. Not only is it good manners to stress the positive when leaving, but items in your personnel file may long outlast the individuals and circumstances responsible for your dissatisfaction. You never know when your path will cross those of your former colleagues. To keep your resignation short, simple, and positive, you may want to write something like:**
- **"I want to thank you for all you have done for me here at [Company]. It's been a pleasure working with you, and representing the company as your [job title].**
- **I have accepted an offer with another firm and have decided to tender my resignation as of today. This decision has nothing to do with the exceptional opportunity you have provided for me here. You and the company have been more than fair with me, and I genuinely appreciate all your support.**
- **I wish [Company] continued success, and I want to thank you for allowing me to be a part of your team. Please feel free to contact me at any time if I can be of further assistance in helping with a smooth transition."**
- **Letters get filed and passed around to explain what happened, reducing the call for endless orations on the same subject. They also dispel any perceived ambivalence in your behavior during this delicate time.**

THE COUNTEROFFER

- Surveys show that eight out of ten employees who accept counteroffers don't complete the following year with their employer.
- Why shun counteroffers? Because the factors that caused you to seek or entertain a better offer are likely to remain in force. Beside which, your current employer will probably lose trust in your loyalty.
- Accepting a counteroffer may permanently damage your reputation with your would-be-employer. Your prospective new colleagues may conclude that you were merely using them to gain leverage; you weren't in earnest as a candidate. Never underestimate the value of your perceived integrity in this situation.
- The best response to a counteroffer is to listen politely, perhaps even sleep on it, but decline. If your current firm denied you advancement before you secured an outside offer, it will probably thwart you next time you feel ready to advance. What's more, your firm may start looking to replace you the day you accept the counteroffer. Your plans for leaving may not be forgotten!

LEAVE ON THE RIGHT NOTE

- Before leaving the firm, take time to speak with each of your support staff, peers, executive personnel, and others with whom you've worked. To the extent practical, clear up any unfinished business. Be sensitive to others' reactions and keep your conversations positive and constructive.
- Some people may naturally express their own discontentment, and may egg you on to agree with them. Don't! Instead, express your appreciation and tell your colleagues you'll miss them. A little time spent nurturing relationships before leaving for your new job will go a long way to build support for your future.
- Also keep in mind that it is professional courtesy to give your employer ample notice to help them prepare for your departure - typically, 2 weeks. However, you should try to get out as soon as possible to avoid recurring invitations to tell your story, and to avoid having to deal with the frustrations and pressures at the job as the firm adjusts to your leaving.

Sample Resignation Letter

(Date)
(Company Name)
(Address)
(City, State Zip)

Dear (Employer Name):

This letter is to inform you that I wish to terminate my employment with (Company Name) effective (Date). I have accepted a new position and have decided to move on with my career.

I want to express my gratitude for a rewarding opportunity with (Company Name) and with you personally. This decision to pursue another opportunity was not an easy one. But it is right for me as I work toward fulfilling goals. I hope you will respect my position in this matter.

My efforts until my end date will be to wrap up my products here and turn over my responsibilities as smoothly as possible.

Sincerely,

(Your name)

Why it pays to QUIT

Loyalty, shmoyalty. In today's frenzied job market, staying put gets you nowhere. Walking out gets you ahead.

BY KIM CLARK

Truck drivers are abandoning their rigs at truck stops and driving off with recruiters who offer them a few more pennies per mile. Waitresses scooping up tips of dollars and dimes are also pocketing business cards left by competing restaurant managers. When pharmacists answer the phone, they hear the healthy voices of headhunters offering big signing bonuses to jump to the new chain store across town.

Maybe your mother told you that quitters never prosper. Well, Mom never saw a job market like this. No one has. Trying to rein in salaries, employers continue to limit annual raises for longtime employees to a paltry 4 percent, on average. But in their hunger for extra staff, they are offering job hoppers 10 to 20 percent raises over their current salaries. By the millions, American workers are taking the hint and the cash. Based on a survey of resignation rates by the Saratoga Institute, a work-force research firm, *U.S. News* estimates that approximately 17 million workers will quit to take other jobs this year, up 6 million from five years ago. The quit rates in some industries, such as the notoriously low-paying retail sector, are mind-boggling. On average, companies nationwide will have to replace one seventh of their work force this year, but the National Retail Federation says that because part-time clerks tend to stick for only a few months, a typical store replaces the equivalent of nearly its entire work force annually.

Money talks. True, people change jobs for all sorts of reasons. But anyone who thinks puny raises aren't at the root of almost every decision to quit gets a snort from Stephen Pollan, co-author of career advice books like *Live Rich* and an upcoming negotiation primer. "Boy, are they wrong," he says. In his opinion, money is behind many of the common nonfinancial explanations for changing jobs. It can ease the pain of personal problems such as child- or elder-care crises, Pollan notes. A hefty raise can also compensate for an obnoxious boss or other workplace hassles.

Dan Meyers, 51, couldn't agree more. The manager of five mobile-home parks in Connecticut, Meyers was fed up with being on call seven days a week, breakdown-prone equipment, and his frozen salary. Early this year, he gave up asking for improvements and found another job. Now manager of a nursing home near Chicago, he is still on call evenings and weekends and has plenty of stress. But he doesn't mind so much because he's earning \$15,000 more a year. "People say it isn't the money," Meyers says. "But it is. It is always the money."

There may be plenty of good reasons to stick with your current job—great benefits, a pension plan, or you might just plain enjoy it. And the quit-to-win strategy does have a downside. Job-hoppers have no chance of retiring with a company pension, for example, and they face the danger that in a downturn, the most recent and higher-paid hires will be the first fired.

But loyalty also now carries a cost. If longtime employees ever decide to look for other jobs, some recruiters suspect they lack drive or competence. Chris Olson, a headhunter in Fresno, Calif., says she recently tried to sell an employer on a prospective applicant who had been at his current job for 15 years. "The employer asked: 'What's wrong with him?' I said: 'He's loyal.' "

How did we stumble into this through-the-looking-glass job market, in which loyal workers are left behind? One reason is that companies believe it is more profitable this way. It's hard to argue with them—so far, anyway. Since the beginning of this economic expansion in 1991, companies have budgeted 4 percent annual merit raises for their salaried workers and slightly less for hourly workers. Corporate profits, meanwhile, have risen by 9.4 percent a year. Executives and investors have done even better. Take-

home pay of CEOs of large corporations rose by 13 percent a year in the same period. The S&P 500 index has skyrocketed by 15.5 percent a year.

Bye-bye, staffers. The calculus is simple to managers like Theresa Hoover, who heads human resources for Gallery Graphics, a Joplin, Mo., firm of some 100 workers that makes frames and gifts. Large raises have gone only to a few indispensable workers who threatened to leave. That's meant a lot of costly turnover, but Hoover shrugs it off. "We just have to lose people," she says. "It is cheaper than giving general raises."

That's why professional career coaches like Leslie Prager, founder of the Prager-Bernstein Group and coordinator of the Career Center at New York's New School University, warns clients not to expect big raises from their current employer. If your boss tries to keep you from jumping by making a counteroffer, you're probably wise to ignore it. "They shouldn't, but employers hold it against you," she says. Her straightforward advice: "To get a significant raise, you have to change jobs."

Demographics also work against many baby boomers who stay loyal. Most companies say they distribute raise funds by merit. But they also tend to distribute the money by age: The older the worker, the smaller the percentage raise, observes Sylvester Schieber, vice president of research and information for Watson Wyatt Worldwide, a human resources consultant. He says this makes economic sense not just because it limits the dollars the companies hand out—it doesn't take many dollars to give a big percentage raise to a young, low-wage worker. It's also a good strategy for companies because younger workers are probably showing the biggest increases in productivity, Schieber says. Middle-aged workers, who are already comparatively well paid and productive, find themselves bumping up against the corporate ceiling. "There are so many baby boomers in journeyman positions that there is a bottleneck at the top," Schieber explains.

No bump. That's what happened to Dennis Morris, who spent seven years working in the lab for Watson Pharmaceuticals in Salt Lake City. Early this year, Morris, 42, realized he had topped out. "They couldn't bump me up to the next level, senior scientist" because he only had a bachelor's degree, not a doctorate. And there was plenty of competition for management jobs. Facing the prospect of doing the same job for 3 percent raises for the rest of his life, Morris concluded: "The only way to move up was to move companies." He called a local headhunter, checked Web sites for job listings, and read the want ads. After a couple of months, he found a job testing vitamins in the lab at a nearby vitamin company for a 20 percent raise.

Even if they aren't being pushed to look for new jobs by their current employers, new technology is pulling a lot of workers into the job market. Becky Dinkins, 49, a part-time school aide, "hadn't even thought of looking for a job online." Cruising the Internet this summer, she happened to click on a banner ad for the CareerPath Web site. She noodled around and suddenly was staring at a want ad that seemed to have her name on it—and paid twice as much as her current job—for 10 hours less a week. She clicked over to the employer's Web site, printed out an application, and a week later, was talking to the man who became her new boss. She loves her new job installing videoconferencing equipment in schools so NASA scientists can talk with students, she has more time to spend with her 13-year-old son, and she's using the extra money to buy a house—all because of an accidental job search.

Drugstore cowboys. Don't think for a moment that the job shortage is limited to the red-hot technology field. As a result of the booming economy, dozens of headhunters make cold calls or lurk outside workplaces to nab bodies in occupations that just a few years ago were overcrowded. Ray Rogers spends much of his day taking calls from desperate pharmacies at the San Antonio headquarters of Innovative Staff Search. He scours the country for pharmacists at a drugstore paying, say, \$25 an hour and offers them, typically, a 50-cent-an-hour raise and up to a \$5,000 signing bonus if they'll shift to a competing store across town. They'll get more if they have to move or if the job is a promotion, he says. "It's crazy. Five years ago we had to fight to get openings. Today there aren't enough pharmacists to go around," he says. Other headhunters repeat similar stories for anyone with computer expertise, as well as a host of less nerdy skills: chefs, assistant store managers, nurses, truck drivers, journalists, even barkeeps.

Chuck Dressler had worked at a Red Lobster restaurant in Atlanta for less than two years as a bartender and fill-in manager when headhunters started calling. "I always thought that was just for computer people or high-level" executives, he says with wonder. Soon he got a call he couldn't refuse: a \$10,000 raise and promotion to assistant manager at Mick's, an Atlanta-based chain. Now Dressler is one of the hunters, handing his business card to waiters and waitresses at other restaurants.

Keep on truckin'. Finding another job is so easy that workers of all stripes are jumping for relatively small advantages. Donnie Whitley of Milano, Texas, had trouble finding his first truck-driving job in 1987. In the past couple of years, though, whenever he pulls into a truck stop one recruiter or another tries to lure him. Earlier this month, he jumped to his 11th employer in his 12-year driving career, joining Hawk Transport of Dallas because it promised steady work, a friendly atmosphere, and a 3 percent raise. "From my point of view, it's a big raise," he says.

All this pushing by employers and pulling by the Internet can't help but change worker attitudes. Through much of the hiring binge of the 1990s, economists, including Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, have puzzled over why so many workers have clung to low-paying jobs. After all, surveys by the Hay Group show workers' satisfaction with their compensation has eroded steadily from its 58 percent approval rating in the late 1970s. As workers have watched profits and executive pay skyrocket past them in the 1990s, their happiness with their compensation level has slipped to about 40 percent. Fed up, wired, and ready to grab their share of the boom, workers are abandoning their economically puzzling job insecurities and loyalties. Millions of American workers who'd never before thought about changing jobs are logging on to want-ad Web sites. What's more, they're doing it on company time. Hits on the new Wanted Technologies meta-Web site (which searches 30 other job sites) peak at 1 p.m. And those who seek are taking the jobs they're finding. Five years ago, 1 in 10 workers was a quitter. Today the number is 1 in 7.

Darren Smith, 32, remembers how he lost his nerve in his first attempt to switch jobs. Instead, he gladly accepted a counteroffer from his first employer, a small software firm. Within a year he was sorry, though, as he realized he would have to keep getting other offers to get more raises and promotions. In the five years since then, he has changed jobs twice for big raises. He likes his job as a network services engineer at the Web division of a publisher in Tampa, but he still checks Web site job listings and help-wanted ads religiously because he believes "there's always somebody willing to pay you more down the street."

When Dixy De La Rosa, 28, was finishing up her architecture degree at Kent State University in Ohio last year, she was frightened by reports from recent grads that they'd had trouble finding jobs. She found one easily, and early this year, when she heard that her boss at a New Jersey architecture firm hadn't given annual raises to other employees, she picked up the Sunday paper and started looking again. "He thought we had to put up with whatever he offered," she says. Another New Jersey architecture and engineering firm offered her a job paying \$4,000 more a year and a leased BMW if she stayed a year.

Lunch crunch. Yet job jumping can carry a psychic cost. Proving yourself again is emotionally exhausting. So is learning new bureaucracies, coping with a new insurance and benefits package, making new friends, even figuring out the best lunch spot. That's what 31-year-old Penny Brothers learned this summer. After four years of feeling underpaid as an account manager at an Orange County, Calif., insurance brokerage, she landed a job as an account manager at a health claims administration company for \$6,000 more. But her new office was poorly organized, so she had to put in long hours filling in for others. Worn out and frustrated, she quit for a sales job that paid less (though still more than the previous job) but promises more in commission and fewer hassles. "The more you [quit]," says Brothers, "the easier it gets."

Some employers are finding the growing popularity of job hopping so distressing—and potentially unprofitable—that they are beginning to reward loyalty again. Costs associated with turnover are skyrocketing for some employers. Surveys by the Saratoga Institute show the average time to fill openings has increased by 10 days to 51 days in the past 3 years. And some employers say they can't afford to lose too much institutional memory.

A penny saved by not giving a raise isn't always a penny earned. Mike McBroom, vice president for human resources for the Hendrick Health System in Abilene, Texas, says his hospital brags that it is keeping raises to the industry standard 4 percent. But, he acknowledges, "When you tack on recruiting costs and hiring bonuses, our budget is probably up 10 percent." McBroom says the hospital is now considering retention bonuses as a counterweight to hiring bonuses.

Don't go. Larry Hall, Chuck Dressler's boss at Mick's Restaurant in Atlanta, has thought hard about the value of loyalty. Last year, he was recruited away from a company that offered meager raises, and he doesn't want to repeat his previous employer's mistakes. He's also seen studies showing that restaurants with stable work forces make more money. So Hall is handing out annual raises of about 8 percent this year. But he can't afford such big raises forever. At some point, his workers "will be topped out and they'll leave," he says.

Someday, too, the great hiring frenzy will screech to a halt. The growing recruitment and retention costs will put pressure on prices. The Federal Reserve, already hypersensitive to any signs of inflation, will raise interest rates in response. Then will come the true test of the technological and attitudinal changes in the labor market.

The free agents of the work force may indeed be the first to suffer when Internet sites and headhunters stop bidding for their services. But two dozen years of corporate layoffs and the Internet communications revolution have combined to release the genie of employee loyalty from its cubicle. It would take more than a run-of-the-mill recession to make workers as different as architect De La Rosa, computer maven Smith, and account manager Brothers forget the thrill of walking into their boss's office with a better offer in their pocket and saying, "I quit."

With Joellen Perry

Ten Signs that it's time to go

Every job has frustrations. But if you feel ignored, it may not be because you're a loser. So how do you know when it's time to update the resume or hit up the college pal with the dot-com start up? A few thoughts:

- 1. You spend your entire raise on the celebratory six-pack.**
You may not be working to get rich, but money is still the best way to keep score.
- 2. Your new project leader is so young he thinks Creedence Clearwater Revival is a Pentecostal Church in West Virginia.**
You want to work at a place where you are getting the choice assignments.
- 3. You get more calls from headhunters than from the boss.**
It's true; sometimes people outside an organization will recognize and value abilities more highly than the folks whom you see every day.
- 4. When you ask about stock options, you're given the choice of blue or black ballpoint pens.**
If a company doesn't give you proper incentives, says Hussam Hamadeh, president of Vault.com, a career resource web site, it probably doesn't value your work.
- 5. The company spends more on the executive retreat than on research and development.**
New products mean new opportunities for you. And remember, while a job hop is risky, there is risk in whiling away productive years at a dead-end job.
- 6. You see your office PC at the Smithsonian.**
You need the right tools to do your job right, says Mark Poppen, career advice columnist for *interbiznet.com*, an electronic recruiting newsletter.
- 7. Your only friend at work is the UPS man.**
It could be you just don't fit into the corporate culture. Then again, it could be you! But seriously, if your work mates are focusing on how you dress than what you say, your ideas may never get a fair hearing.
- 8. Your long-awaited promotion means taking on the workload of the guy who just quit.**
Hard work is *de riguer* these days, but when a company cuts costs it could be slipping.
- 9. The continuing education program is the Learning Channel on the break-room TV.**
Don't discount the benefits an employer offers. They're another form of cash.
- 10. You're reading this, aren't you?**
Enough said.

When you want to quit and the boss says:

'Stay'

You've landed a new job, composed a discreet resignation letter and broken the news to your boss. He goes into shock.

"I thought you were as happy with us as we are with you," he says. "Let's discuss it before you make your final decision."

Soon, you find yourself being offered a substantial raise, with promises of great things for the future if you stay. It seems the company that had been taking you for granted has suddenly realized it can't get along without you.

How flattering! How tempting! How dangerous!

You have just received a counteroffer: an inducement from your current employer to lure you back into the nest after you've decided it's time to fly away.

It's a delicious moment, and you have every right to savor it. But don't stop cleaning out your desk.

Career-planning experts say that accepting a counteroffer is almost always a bad idea.

"It never works out, not for more than a month or three, so forget it," advises Burton E. Lipman, author of "The Professional Job Search Program."

"Career suicide" is Paul Hawkinson's two-word opinion of counteroffers. In 20 years as an executive recruiter, Hawkinson says he has seen "only isolated incidents in which an accepted counteroffer has benefited the employee.

"Counteroffers are usually nothing more than stall devices to give your employer time to replace you," Hawkinson wrote recently in National Business Employment Weekly.

But they've just offered you a raise to make you stay. Why would they want to replace you?

Because, little bird, you are a loyalty risk. By threatening to fly to another company, you have demonstrated a lack of fidelity. You are not a "team player." You will henceforth be regarded with suspicion.

What kind of future can you expect at a company that doesn't trust you?

Chances are your boss didn't make that counteroffer because he wants to have you around forevermore. He just hasn't got your shoes at the moment. Once a suitable replacement is found, you'll be *persona non grata*.

The time to leave is when you're ready to go, not when your boss is ready to get rid of you.

But it would be so much easier to stay in the old nest. Like any venture into the unknown, a job change is tough.

"That's why," says Hawkinson, "bosses know they can usually keep you around by pressing the right buttons."

Don't tear up that resignation letter.

Ask yourself why you wanted to leave the job in the first place. Chances are, those reasons still exist. The counteroffer only temporarily cushions the thorns in the nest.

"Conditions are just made a bit more tolerable in the short term because of the raise, promotion or promises made to keep you," Hawkinson says.

"Counteroffers are only made in response to a threat to quit. Will you have to solicit an offer and threaten to quit every time you deserve better working conditions?"

Who wants to work for a company where you have to get an outside offer before the boss will come up with a raise or a promotion?

Counteroffer Acceptance

The Road to Career Ruin

THE FORDYCE LETTER, BY PAUL HAWKINSON

Matthew Henry, the 17th century writer said, “Many a dangerous temptation comes to us in fine gay colours that are but skin deep.” The same can be said for counteroffers, those magnetic enticements designed to lure you back into the nest after you’ve decided to fly away.

The litany of horror stories I have come across in my years as an executive recruiter, consultant, and publisher, provides a litmus test that clearly indicates counteroffers should never be accepted...EVER!

I define a counteroffer simply as an inducement from your current employer to get you to stay after you’ve announced your intention to take another job. We’re not talking about those instances when you receive an offer but don’t tell your boss. Nor are we discussing offers that you never intended to take, yet tell your employer about anyway as a ‘they-want-me-out-I’m-staying-with-you’ ploy.

These are merely astute positioning tactics you may choose to use to reinforce your worth by letting your boss know you have other options. Mention of a true counteroffer, however, carries an actual threat to quit.

Interviews with employers who make counteroffers, and employees who accept them, have shown that as tempting as they may be, acceptance may cause career suicide. During the past 20 years, I have seen only isolated incidents in which an accepted counteroffer has benefited the employee. Consider the problem in this proper perspective.

What really goes through a boss’ mind when someone quits?

- “This couldn’t be happening at a worse time.”
- “This is one of my best people. If I let him quit now, it’ll wreak havoc on the morale of the department.”
- “I’ve already got one opening in my department. I don’t need another right now.”
- “This will probably screw up the entire vacation schedule.”
- “I’m working as hard as I can, and I don’t need to do his work, too.”
- “If I lose another good employee, the company might decide to ‘lose’ me too.”
- “My review is coming up and this will make *me* look bad.”
- “Maybe I can keep him on until I find a suitable replacement.”

What will the boss say to keep you in the nest? Some of these comments are common.

- “I’m really shocked. I thought you were as happy with us as we are with you. Let’s discuss it before you make your final decision.”
- “Aw gee, I’ve been meaning to tell you about the great plans we have for you, but it’s been confidential until now.”
- “The V.P. has you in mind for some exciting and expanding responsibilities.”
- Your raise was scheduled to go into effect next quarter, but we’ll make it effective immediately.”
- “You’re going to work for who?”

Let's face it. When someone quits, it's a direct reflection on the boss. Unless you're really incompetent or a destructive thorn in his side, the boss might look bad by "allowing" you to go. His gut reaction is to do what has to be done to keep you from leaving until he's ready. That's human nature.

Unfortunately, it's also human nature to want to stay unless your work life is abject misery. Career changes, like all ventures into the unknown, are tough. That's why bosses know they can usually keep you around by pressing the right buttons.

Before you succumb to a tempting counteroffer, consider these universal truths:

- Any situation, in which an employee is forced to get an outside offer before the present employer will suggest a raise, promotion, or better working conditions, is suspect.
- No matter what the company says when making its counteroffer, you will always be considered a fidelity risk. Having once demonstrated your lack of loyalty (for whatever reason), you will lose your status as a "team player" and your place in the inner circle.
- Counteroffers are usually nothing more than stall devices to give your employer time to replace you.
- Your reasons for wanting to leave still exist. Conditions are just made a bit more tolerable in the short term because of the raise, promotion, or promises made to keep you.
- Counteroffers are only made in response to a threat to quit. Will you have to solicit an offer and threaten to quit every time you deserve better working conditions?
- Decent and well-managed companies don't make counteroffers...EVER! Their policies are fair and equitable. They will not be subjected to "counteroffer coercion" or what they perceive as blackmail.

If the urge to accept a counteroffer hits you, keep on cleaning out your desk as you count your blessings.

Mr. Hawkinson is publisher of The Fordyce Letter, a monthly Missouri-based newsletter for the personnel, executive search and employment counseling fields. He was formerly an executive recruiter and consultant.