



Time to Tell the Boss “Goodbye”

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You’re at the end of a long process. You started with a decision to leave. Or, it might be that you weren’t even thinking of leaving. In any case, you connected with an opportunity that you know is the right one for you. You’ve signed their offer letter and worked out a start date.

Now, all you need to do is resign.

What to do?

Resigning isn’t usually taught in any classes, and few of us have seen anyone else actually resign. So, word-of-mouth and general guess-work supply most of what people know about how to do. Bad advice ends up being passed along.

There’s no percentage in using this as a chance to tell them all the things you think they could do better. At this point, it doesn’t matter. As you build your career, you will need all your references. Don’t blow one of them on a moment of empty satisfaction.

Giving notice should be a simple, thoughtful and carefully planned event. The only thing that is really critical is making the transition of your departure as smooth as possible for the employer you are leaving. What is it that you need to get done to leave your employer in the best position you can? Focus on that and you can reduce your stress.

When to do it?

The question: When? The answer: Immediately. Exception: Never on a Friday, and above all never on a Friday afternoon. Would you want your weekend ruined at the loss of a top performer? Monday or Tuesday - later in the day - are better choices.

No matter how close you may be to some of your co-workers, tell the boss first. It’s the boss’s responsibility, and right, to tell everyone else.

How to do it?

When it comes to your resignation letter, less is more. It should state the obvious: you are resigning. Something like this:

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Dear Boss,

Please accept this letter as my official notice of resignation. I appreciate the work we have been able to accomplish together at [company name], but I have made a commitment to another firm and my last day here will be [date].

It is my intention to work with you to wrap up as much as possible in the time remaining, so my resignation is as smooth as I can make it. If you have suggestions for accomplishing that goal, I hope you will share them with me. I am eager to leave on the most positive note possible.

Sincerely,

The easiest mistake to make is including too much detail. The more information you include - the reasons you're leaving, where you're going, how much you're going to make - the more you open the door for your employer to have conversations with you that you don't want to have. Unless your objective is to use your resignation to generate a counter-offer (BIG MISTAKE!), keep it simple.

After you've written your letter, you should deliver it to the boss. With few exceptions, you should do this in a face-to-face meeting. When you request the meeting, your boss may ask about your agenda. Your agenda: "a matter of personal concern that needs to be addressed confidentially".

Have your letter in hand as you walk in to the meeting. Hand it over to the boss by saying something like, "Boss, I've made a commitment to join another firm. My last day here will be [date]. Please accept my letter of resignation. I'd like you to take a minute to read my letter before we discuss how to make my transition as smooth as possible."

Avoid drama, but be politely persistent until the letter is read. Your boss knows what is in the letter. Not reading it is one of the first stages of denial. Your boss may actually not read it as part of a power play. If so, do you need any more confirmation for why you are leaving?

Once your boss has read the letter, share your review of those projects and activities that need to be wrapped up prior to your last day, and your plan to get them done. The more you have thought through this transition, and the more clearly you focus on those steps in your conversation, the smoother the process will be.

It's not unusual for the boss to employ the "shock and amazement" treatment, followed by the "who, what, why" questions. Don't allow this tactic to blur your focus on making the transition as smooth as possible. Diplomatically deflect the questions and return to the topic of the transition:



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I know you're curious about where I'm going and why, but it's not my intention to discuss that today. My decision is made and I have a commitment to another firm. If it's really important for you to know, let's talk about it when it is not an emotional issue for us, say a month from now. In the meantime, my focus is on making the transition as smooth as possible.

At this stage of the game, professions of concern or a desire to discuss your future are stall tactics. All the more reason for you to maintain your laser-like focus on the smooth transition. This is the singular goal of this meeting.

Once you get past this most difficult point, here are some pointers to make the remaining steps easier:

- Call someone - husband, wife, the recruiter who helped you land the new job - who will talk to you with a welcoming voice after this stressful interaction. Don't talk about your resignation to your peers.
- Mail or email a copy of your letter to your boss's direct supervisor and to your human resources contact. This helps get the ball rolling on wrapping up your employment "officially".
- As you leave the office on this important day, take the three or four most emotionally important items home with you. Family photos, company photos and awards. Begin the process of removing yourself from this workspace. Take a few items home very night for the next few days.
- Make sure you have ALREADY removed any personal items from your laptop or PC. Also, copies of employee reviews, client testimonials or recommendations - whatever you may want as part of a future job search portfolio - should already be in your possession and off-site. Take only what is rightfully yours. You don't need anything else, so just leave it behind and do the right thing.
- Politely decline an exit interview. Little can be learned that is helpful for you at this point. Don't buy into the notion that you could make things better for those who remain. If you must do an exit interview, be polite, answer questions in a simple, perfunctory manner with short answers that have little detail. Do not delve into anything controversial. Remember, your answers become part of your permanent employee record.
- Focus on legitimately wrapping up your business and/or transferring projects and responsibilities to co-workers, your replacement or boss. Even if you don't get much direction, document your work so that it can be easily understood once you're gone. Leave a cell phone number where you can be reached if clarification is needed.

Don't be surprised if your boss persists with the "who, what and why" questions. Gently brush them aside by talking about your progress in getting things wrapped up. Keep your eye on that new job and getting ready for the new challenges there. One door is closing but an even more exciting one is opening. That's where you should have your attention.