



## A Good Person Is Resigning. Here's How Not to Burn the Bridge

### Description

If you are in management, you have probably experienced this scenario: One of your best employees asks to meet with you and informs you that they have accepted an offer from another employer and are resigning. How do you respond? Most likely your response is based on your relationship with the person and their performance. If they are a solid performer and you wish they would stay, what if you said to them, "If your new job is not what you think it will be, we would love for you to come back?"

I have previously written that in a great culture the person's supervisor is aware they are looking. It can lead to a healthy discussion on *why*. Often it is for a reason the current employer cannot solve, such as a move to be closer to family or to a city they want to live in. The person could be leaving for a position that is not available with the current employer. Or it could be a lateral move to a larger company that will offer more upward mobility.

Creating a culture where it's okay to be open about job searches has so many advantages. As the current employer, you can help the person better handle the interview process. If the person does leave, you have more notice and have time to plan for the departure. If the departure does not occur, the relationship is stronger for the person feels supported.

Over the years, I have helped current workers prepare for interviews with other companies. We never want to be seen as holding a person back from an opportunity. I find one of the most gratifying experiences is to see people I have worked with making positive differences with other companies and in their communities. A key role we each play is being the "chief development officer" for those we lead. That means when they are part of our organizations, we prepare them for the next place. My experience is this approach leads to more people staying.

At times, when people inform us that they're leaving, it's because performance counseling is taking place, and they know the situation is not a good fit. In rare instances, an employee may just leave. However, most people will give proper notice. For hourly workers, a two-week notice is the norm, and for salaried employees, thirty days is the norm. However, these time frames aren't set in stone. This is where the leader needs to use their best judgment. Will having the person work through the time be best for the employee? The coworkers? The organization?

People want to work through the notice period to be fair to their coworkers and the company. They want to make sure they are leaving on good terms. Yet there are times it may be best to have the person leave as quickly as possible. If there are issues already, it is not healthy to have the person stay. It is best to pay the person as if they worked the duration of the two weeks or thirty days and have them exit. It is very much in the hands of the leader to make that call on what is best for those involved.

As mentioned earlier, it would be great if people shared with their supervisor that they are interviewing or looking to interview; however, that is still the exception. So let's say the person you value has just now let you know they are leaving. People in leadership are human, and at times it is normal to be disappointed and hurt. Some leaders can let their anger get the best of them. For example, a leader who hears someone is interviewing somewhere else might let the person know they can leave now. Even though the person wants to work their notice, the leader moves them out immediately. When we think of burning bridges, we think of the person on the way out. Yet people who stay, including leaders, can also burn bridges.

During the pandemic, some healthcare workers resigned from their current job to accept what is often called a traveling job. Some leaders understood the reasoning. A long-term employee whose situation allows them to relocate for a time and make dollars can benefit tremendously from a traveling job. Some leaders accepted this reasoning, treated the person well, and let them know that if there were open positions, they would be welcomed back. (In hospitals, there usually are openings.) This sends the right message. The best leaders also said, "In your travels, you will be seeing lots of best practices. We'd love to stay in touch to see what you are learning for I know you want the staff and patients here to do well."

Some organizations take departures as an act of betrayal and burn the bridge. I attended a conference to award Malcolm Baldrige recipients. Each honoree shared what worked. One CEO shared that when a solid employee resigns, they let the person know that for the next three months, if what they left for turned out not to be what they thought it was, they could come back as if they never left (assuming there was an open position). They would not need to start over with benefits and so forth. (This was mostly hourly paid workers.) He said this policy created multiple wins. Some people returned and did so more seamlessly. Even those who did not come back were supporters of the organization. You may wonder if that encouraged people to leave. It did not. It helped people know they were in a good place.

My main message is if you are leaving or thinking of leaving your current workplace, do not burn a bridge. If you are in management and someone is leaving, do not burn a bridge either. Make it easier for the person to return. Often the grass is *not* greener somewhere else, but we do not know it till we leave.

Sometime back I wrote about how well we treat some people when they are leaving, by throwing goodbye parties and showing our appreciation. I made the point that perhaps if we treated them that way all the time, they would not be leaving. When we regularly show employees how much we value them, we're more likely to create a workplace where people are engaged and fulfilled—one where they already know the grass is green, and even if they do decide to leave, they will be welcomed back. This is the kind of culture where the best and brightest want to be.

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