

LEAVING A JOB WITHOUT BURNING BRIDGES by [Barbra Lewis](#)

When Shea Weston began interviewing for a new job last year, she quickly learned that the world is indeed a small, small place.

She was living in Iowa at the time and was contacted about a job in Florida. After several phone interviews, she was flown to the company to meet with her potential co-workers . . .one of which happened to be her boss from her first-ever job out of college.

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"I hated that job, but not because of him," Weston says. "He was actually very nice. But I worked there for two months and then found a job I liked better and, well, just cleaned out my desk and left. I didn't realize the trouble I was causing. Needless to say the interview was a bit uncomfortable."

Weston and her former boss mended fences at lunch later that day, but the damage was done. She continued her job search elsewhere.

No matter how much you enjoy or dislike your job, leaving it will always be accompanied by some feelings of regret.

If we like our job, leaving is uncomfortable. We might feel we are abandoning commitments and friendships, and our instinct may be to get out ASAP. If we hate our job, we might be thrilled to be going, feel we owe the business nothing, and therefore have the desire to drop everything and run.

But you cannot make those mistakes--especially in today's wired world where networking accounts for most hires (85% of jobs are unadvertised, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)) and where job-hopping is practically chic. No matter what the reason, you must leave your job in as an above-board a manner as possible. Some rules-of-thumb:

Allow enough time at your old job. The old two-week notice is still standard. This allows you time to finish projects and complete the exit process (finalizing benefits, payment, exit interviews and so on). You look responsible because you are still prioritizing your current job and not shucking work to others. It also allows your company time to start searching for a replacement. You can even offer to help.

"Consider the last few days on the job as an opportunity to leave everything well organized," says Dr. Bill Stone, a career counselor with the [Maine Educational Services Foundation](#). "Also keep the colleagues that will have to fill the gap you will leave well-informed as to your duties."

Do your homework. Don't expect HR to tell you every step you need to take in leaving. Look over benefits and payroll paperwork and your company handbook to make certain you are tying up all loose ends.

Write a resignation letter. Keep it short and sweet, and more importantly, mature and polite. This is not the place for accusations if you are leaving under bad circumstances. Simply state that you are leaving and why (perhaps your new position is "a step toward a new career") and when your last day will be. It is also courteous to thank the employer for your time there. (Again, the more professional you can make your impression, the better, regardless of your reason for leaving).

"It is always in your best interest to leave past employers sorry that you left," says Stone. "Your reputation as a good worker will follow you and keep open doors that you may want to walk back into again."

Form your reference/support network now, and keep in touch. Be sure to get names and contact information of co-workers, clients and supervisors you would like to have as future references. Once you've left, you won't be able to access the e-mail you've left behind. And be sure to give them your new contact information.

If you are leaving under bad circumstances, it's best to keep it to yourself. This especially applies if you are planning legal action (discrimination, harassment, etc.). You don't want to give the company time to prepare a case against you before you have time to speak with a lawyer.

The job you are leaving will still remain a part of your employment history for years to come, and you never know when you might have to cross paths again with a former co-worker or boss.

"Once you are out the door, never complain about former employers," says Stone. "Keep your attitude positive and project the image of someone moving to future success, not as a refugee from an unfortunate situation. If people ask you why you left, focus on what you hope to accomplish for your next employer."

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Resignation Check List

1. Be confident in your decision. “Never consider a post resignation Counter Offer!”
2. Have a resignation letter written and ready.
3. Clean out your desk.
4. Clean out and/or copy your “personal address book”.
5. Clean out and/or copy your “personal files” in email.
6. Copy and/or delete any personal files in your computer.
7. Resign to your immediate supervisor first, then HR, offering two weeks notice.
8. Gather professional references from 3 co-workers for future job changes.
9. Finish your two weeks notice with a complete transition plan.
10. Leave on a good note, no matter how you feel about your employer.

Sample Resignation Letter

*(Date***)*

*(Boss' name***)*

*(Boss' title***)*

*(Company name***)*

*(Company address***)*

Dear (Boss' name),***

Please accept this letter as my official notice of resignation. I appreciate the work we have been able to accomplish together at (XYZ company), but I have now made a commitment to another organization, and plan to begin with them in two weeks (date***). My last day here will be (date***).***

Know that it is my intention to work diligently with you to wrap up as much as possible in the next two weeks to make my resignation as smooth as possible. If you have any suggestions on how we can best accomplish that goal, I hope you will share your thoughts with me, as I am eager to leave on the most positive note possible.

Sincerely,

(employee name)***