

Resignation Without Reservation: The How To's of Quitting

You know you're in trouble if you've even thought about saying the words, "I'm **tendering** my resignation." There's nothing tender about it. I have a foolproof system for helping the candidates I place quit their jobs, but it won't work unless one thing is true. You Really Want To Quit!

Some candidates give notice for the simple reason that they have accepted another job and now must do the painful (hence "tender") part of letting a boss they might admire or even love know that they are abandoning ship. These folks I can help, but I can't help you if the reason you are giving notice is to get the lost attention of your boss.

Don't feel bad. I've done it. Not in business, but in my personal life. I sit you down over an expensive dinner at a fabulous and romantic restaurant to tell you I am breaking up with you. I am moving on. I am tendering my resignation to you as my girlfriend.

But my goal is not to break up. My Goal is to modify your behavior, to get you to see I'm not happy and send an unmistakable (and dramatic) message that you could lose me.

If that's why you're giving notice, I'm sorry to tell you that like my girlfriends, who (after I pay the check) would call my bluff, your boss can see this coming. He will hear you out, he will feign surprise, he will wish you well if you must leave, but is sorry to see you go since he had so many plans for you (plans that he up to now has failed to ever mention). And you stay. Mollified. Shame on you. You want love, buy a dog.

But those of you who just want to move and keep the damage and the drama to a minimum, here's all you need to know:

- The day before you give notice you need to write a letter to your boss that you will never send and no one will ever see. Dump away...all the little wounds, all the times you've been taken for granted, all the reasons you aren't happy. Pile em' high. Get crazy, be honest. Document why you know you need to leave. Read it one more time just before you go to give notice, and shred it. You don't need it anymore.
- Say "I am quitting..." in the first 30 seconds. Not "I am thinking about" or "I've had some interviews," and for God's sake never start with, eyes glistening, "This is the hardest thing I have ever had to do." These phrases send the "meta message" to your boss that you want to stay.
- This is NOT an Exit Interview. This is the delivery of key information. It should take no more than 5 minutes (even at high levels). When they bring out a cake on your last day's lunch and give you a gift half the staff didn't want to pitch in for, then you can sit in your boss's office and tell him all the things you were unhappy about. But not now. Now you are letting him know you are leaving, what date you will be gone, and that you are happy to give two week's notice and not mail it in during the transition. You're done, stand up, reach out your hand.
- If you like your boss, tell him 1) the decision is what's best for you and your family 2) the decision is irrevocable and he/she shouldn't waste their time with a counteroffer. This sends the meta message that he should let go. If he cares about you, he will.
- Give your Notice ONLY after your drug test and physical are complete and non issues. If your new offer is contingent on either one and you fail, AND you've given notice, you are now unemployed. I know you're anxious to get it done. You have to suck it up here.
- Give notice in person. It's like dating. If you had one date, you can break up with a text. If you had sex, it has to be in person. These are the rules. If you worked there a year or more, a call or email or letter is insufficient.

- If you are really scared about losing your nerve, tell a few colleagues that you are leaving. Let word get around. Tell your boss you have told some key people. Guess what? Now he won't even try to keep you, lest he create a mutiny: "Hear how you get a raise, do what John did, go quit!"
- Tell your Boss you are: Not at liberty to discuss 1) where you're going 2) what they are paying you 3) what you'll be doing. This is key if you care about your boss. He/she is human, they are hunting for signals and ammunition. If you refuse to play, they will accept sooner.

I'm obsessed with the similarities between running my search firm and my dating life, (my new book, Harper's Rules, delves deeply into this central analogy) and when people who don't like their jobs and have found a new one ask me "why is quitting so hard?", I'm reminded of a woman who I was done with, and I sat her down to do the deed. I knew she'd be crushed, me being so wonderful and all, and before I could pull the trigger she told me she was glad I called because she wants to break up. And instead of rational thought, "I'm out, I'm out!! I'm not even the bad guy, this is fantastic," I spent the next hour begging her to reconsider.

We know change is good. We know it is essential. We just want to control it, to know how it is going to turn out before we actually take it on. And the world doesn't work that way.