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YOU'RE GIVING NOTICE, and your present company drops the bomb—they have big plans for your future in the company. News flash! As you ponder why you never had heard that before, the flattery and promises begin to flow. If you're a regional manager with a fixture company, you find out you're being groomed for the next VP or national sales position. Or say you're a lighting designer—a new, sexy position is created out of the blue, ironically just when you're giving notice. What a coincidence!

Remember the old axiom, "If it sounds to be good to be true, it probably is?" That definitely applies when it's time to give notice, so expect to hear flattery, promises and plans for you that you had either never heard or discussed as something merely possible down the road. Regardless of their tenure with their old company—whether it's specification sales representative with the company for one year or the 15-year veteran VP of marketing—the majority of people who accept counter offers are not at that company 12 months later. And why? For a variety of reasons:

- The reasons you originally wanted to leave crop up again, whether it's 30 days or six months later. A raise or a promotion or even a combination usually doesn't address those issues.
- History shows that when lay-off time comes for your company, the first to go are those who aren't "team players." Threatening to leave and then changing your mind dumps you *right* into that category.
- Also, if downsizing occurs, don't think that the salary increase that you had received when threatening to resign will go unnoticed. The fattest salaries are scrutinized, as well as people now seemingly being paid a disproportionate amount for their responsibilities.
- Got a great new title out of your counter offer? If it was a specially created position for you when you were resigning, look out. Those types of positions can be most susceptible to companies looking to trim down to the essential positions.

- Resentment. This can come as a surprise, but a lot of people now know that you were out the door, but somehow "bought back." It often creates a stigma; your colleagues may not be happy to think that your situation is seemingly bettered, while their hard work went unnoticed by being a "loyal employee."
- Lastly, and possibly most importantly, if your old employer

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really thought you were worth all the things that suddenly seem to be coming your way—the raise, the new incentive plan, the partnership (or promise of one)—why do you have to threaten to leave to get what you deserve? And do you really want to be in a "relationship" where that is now the pattern for upward progression in your career?

The Usual Suspects

Who are the people most likely to accept counter offers? The green and the inexperienced, and the job-jumpers. The employee most likely to be vulnerable to the counter offer is often the person who is in their first job out of school. When told the president wants to take them out to dinner, or the principal of their firm always thought of them as a future partner, the person with the least job experiences is the one most likely to buy in to the promise (or granting) of a raise. They take at face value the forecast

of a rosy future and unlimited horizons. The more job experience you have and the higher your position in your company, the less likely you will be to believe the dollars, hosannas and commitments that are suddenly coming your way. And with good reason—the person with some job experience under their belt has seen the ultimate fate of colleagues who have accepted the counter offer.

Meanwhile, the job-jumper's reasons for accepting the counter offer are obvious. We all see people who may fit that category; they have more of a hired gun mentality. Just as they are quick to accept the offer with a new company, they're equally fast to renege on their commitment to their new firm if their old company counters with an even better offer. Sold to the highest bidder!

Keep in mind, a good company would be crazy to see a valued employee go and will often do (or at least say) anything to try and retain that individual. This is not to say that people who accept a counter offer have sealed their fate. There are many incidents of a person being suddenly promised perks—whether it's raises, promotions, a new office, or a combination of these and other incentives—and receiving them, exactly as promised. The fact is, experience shows that those people, unfortunately, are in the vast minority. So the question ends up being: How much of a gambler are you?

When It's Time To Resign

Okay, you've successfully deflected (and rejected) the counter offer, opting to accept that great job with a great new company at a new, improved salary. You're excited, your family is proud and your friends are happy for you. And, whether you're going to your new position as vice president of sales, lighting designer, director of product development or product manager, you're going to be facing the same obstacle: giving notice. Telling your current employer you'll be leaving their company is something people never think about, but short of speaking in public, it's probably

one of the things that people dread or fear most.

From vice presidents to inside sales representative, just the thought of actually going in and telling your manager that you're resigning actually makes some people perspire or get nervous. Some folks would rather question their decision to move up to the next step in their career rather than deal with this difficult and uncomfortable moment.

But there are things to know about giving notice, and right and wrong ways. The electrical and lighting industry, while a big one, is a very small family in many ways. You don't want to burn bridges if at all possible. And here are a few steps to avoid doing so:

- Prepare your notice in writing (as well as giving verbally, ideally in person). If your manager is not local, then giving notice via phone is acceptable. Your written notice should be short and sweet; it should contain the date, and a brief statement of your giving notice, along the lines of: "Thank you for the opportunity to work for ABC Company. However, effective [date], I will be leaving the company." Two weeks is standard notice, though occasionally three or four are requested. Besides your manager, send a copy to Human Resources/Payroll. This officially begins preparation of any back expenses, compensation, bonuses, etc. that may be due. Resignation Letter Don'ts: Don't use this note as a time to share any reasons your leaving, e.g., better company, bigger salary, more advancement opportunity, etc. The note should be professional, courteous, diplomatic and very succinct.

- Don't tell any co-workers prematurely of your impending resignation. We hear horror stories from candidates so excited about their new opportunity with their new company, they tell one industry friend (whether the friend is with their company or a related company), swearing them to secrecy. And guess what? It leaks out. Few things can sour a relationship and burn a bridge more than having your current manager hear about

your plans to leave from anyone other than you. If your spouse is in the industry or is friends with your current co-workers or colleagues, make sure he or she understands the importance of not saying anything until you've properly notified the manager of your old company.

- Don't get into detail about where you're going. Don't give up more information than you have to. You don't owe them information about salary, position or much else. But if you are going to a direct competitor, even if you don't tell them of the company, you should let them know. Most companies feel uncomfortable in keeping an employee once they are aware that they're going to a direct competitor, so you want to show them the respect to provide them that option.

- Beware the exit interview, if at all possible. Often conducted by Human Resources, this may sound innocent enough—hey, it's got to be easier than your interviews getting your current job, and, even if you don't do well, you still get to go to your new position with your new company. As well, you may be invited to "vent your spleen," to tell them all the reasons you were dissatisfied with the company. Don't do it. Any thing you say will be remembered, and you don't want to find yourself quoted (or worse, misquoted) regarding your old company or people at the company.

There are few feelings like the relief felt once you've given notice. If you've ever given a speech before a large group of people, you know that feeling. You've accomplished your objective, gained valuable experience and now that it's done, it's time to celebrate. Congratulations!

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