

By Calvin Sun

Take this job and shove it I ain't workin' here no more  
My woman done left and took all the reason I was working for  
Ya better not try and stand in my way  
Cause I'm walkin' out the door  
Take this job and shove it I ain't workin' here no more

—*Take This Job and Shove It*, performed by Johnny Paycheck

Who hasn't been tempted to act like the singer of this song? However, resigning from a job does involve a certain decorum, and doing it properly can only help you later. Here are some tips to consider.

## 1 Write the resignation letter

Even though a resignation letter might not be required, it's a nice touch, and writing one is the professional thing to do. The letter needn't be long. All it really need say is that you're resigning and the date of the resignation. Do you need to give a reason or disclose your new job? It's up to you, if you're comfortable with it. In any event, avoid blasting or dumping on your boss or company. Try to find something good to say if you can and end with thanks for the job you're leaving.

## 2 Be clear about your last day, but be flexible if necessary

In that resignation letter, or in your verbal announcement to your boss, be clear about your final date. In particular, avoid giving just a date alone, without more detail. If, for example, you say, "I am resigning on June 1," what does that mean? Should the boss expect you to be there on June 1, or is your last day really the previous work day, or something else? I recommend an unambiguous statement such as, "I am resigning *at the close of business* June 1."

Be prepared to be flexible about that last day, though, because the boss might want you to finish an assignment, or least your part of an assignment.

## 3 Confirm the handling of unused vacation days

Let's say, using the above example, that you have no time off coming to you -- that is, you have no vacation days, no compensatory days, no sick days, or anything else. In that case, your last day really IS your "last day." Suppose, however, that you have four vacation days remaining, and that June 1 is a Monday. If you're able to do so, the best action is to make your last official day Friday, June 5, but be clear to your boss that you will be on "vacation" those last four days.

It's trickier if, at the time you give your two weeks of notice, your boss says, "Forget the two weeks, leave right now." In this case, the company may not owe you for those two weeks, but rather only for the number of days you worked since your past pay date (assuming the standard practice of paying in arrears—that is, after the work is completed). And if you have unused vacation days or other time off, the company might or might not owe you for that time, depending on your state and whether you have any kind of employment agreement vs. being employed "at will."

Whatever the policy your company has, it's better to find it out before making your announcement.

## 4 Remove important personal effects prior to your announcement

This point is irrelevant if you actually get to stay until the final date you announce. However, it can be critical if you are told to leave immediately. In that case, you'll have little time to pack your things and instead will receive them later via the mail. If you have personal items that are really important to you, think about inconspicuously removing them in the days before your announcement.

Just don't be like the mother who called her son's school, irate because his towel had been stolen during gym class. When asked to describe the towel, the mother snapped, "It's white and says 'Holiday Inn.'" Take only those things that truly are yours. The property of your employer should remain with the employer.

## 5 Leave on the best note possible

We can laugh at what Johnny Paycheck says to his boss about the job. Generally, though, it's better to leave on the best terms possible, with respect to both your boss and your co-workers. Yes, they might have been insufferable and intolerable. On the other hand, you must have learned *something* from working with them. Think of that or something else you can thank them for, as long as it doesn't sound insincere or sarcastic. You can even be frank about it, and say, "Even though we had our moments, I really appreciate learning from you about [topic x]." If nothing else, maybe you can just wish them well. You never know when you might run into them again.

## 6 Let your important contacts know

You might have contacts outside your immediate department. Perhaps you were working with clients, suppliers, or co-workers from other departments. Let them know about your departure so they can make appropriate adjustments. In particular, tell them the status of any open items, so that they can follow up themselves. For example, suppose you're doing problem resolution and have an open problem ticket from the vendor. Let your contact know those details, as well as who is taking over your responsibilities. The best approach is to have a turnover/transition meeting, where you, your contact, and your replacement all sit down and review those items.

## 7 Document your current work

Prepare a document that shows all of your current assignments. In that document, list the names of people you're working with, major issues, and important future dates. This document will allow someone else to take over your job once you're gone.

## 8 Work diligently until your last day

Don't be known as a "short timer." People may think you have no interest in your work because you're soon leaving. Prove them wrong. You might run into your co-workers again, and the impression you leave with them could be critical in the future.

## 9 Double-check on insurance coverage

Make sure you have no gaps in health or disability insurance, particularly if you plan to have unpaid time off between your old and new jobs. Be aware of coverage that may be available to you under the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act—COBRA, for short ([www.dol.gov/dol/topic/health-plans/cobra.htm](http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/health-plans/cobra.htm)). Under this act, generally speaking, workers who leave a company can continue the health benefits they had from that company (although they may have to start paying for those benefits themselves). Such coverage, if available, can be obtained for certain limited periods of time and is designed to cover workers who make a transition from one job to another.

## 10 Adjust your voicemail greeting and (if possible) disable voicemail messaging

In the late summer of 2006, a woman from an organization called me and asked whether I could give a talk to one of their departments. Unfortunately, things didn't work out. A few weeks later, I called to follow up, and left her a voicemail message. After a few days, I didn't hear back, so I left a second voicemail, and again heard nothing. Two weeks later, I called this woman's co-worker and was told the woman had left the organization about two weeks before my first call. It gets better: About a year later, I called this woman's number by accident, and *still* heard her voicemail greeting.

Retaining that greeting for so long makes the organization look foolish. More seriously, it leaves open the chance that you will miss important calls. What's worse, it could be that those messages are non-retrievable even by the voicemail system administrator. So before you leave, re-record your greeting to tell callers that fact. Even better: if your system allows it, also set your extension to "announce only" mode. That is, disable its ability to receive messages.

## 11 Find out whether you're bound by a noncompetition agreement

Did you sign a noncompete agreement at some point in your employment? A full discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this article. But briefly, such an agreement typically restricts a former employee (i.e., you) from competing against a former employer in certain ways, such as by type of work, by length of time, or by geographic location. Some courts take dim views of such agreements (California being a notable example), considering them an infringement on the employee's right to earn a living. Other courts, however, could enforce such agreements in full or in part. If you abide fully by whatever agreement you signed (if any), chances are your former employer's attorneys will leave you alone. But if you're thinking about challenging your agreement, be sure of what you're doing and consider getting a good attorney yourself.

## 12 Prepare for a letdown

Work fills a large part of our time. We have duties, we have co-workers, and yes, we have bosses. Be prepared, when you leave, to feel a letdown or emptiness. It's normal, and it's part of the process of change. At the same time, you can counter those feelings by looking forward to the challenges of your new job.



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