

Chapter 2: The Separation

When You've Just Been Separated

Congratulations! The chances are that no one has said that to you. People are probably either offering their condolences, or avoiding you in the halls. Those are the experiences that many of our clients have when they have lost their jobs. But we are congratulating you. Why? Because once the emotions have settled down and you have started researching new jobs, you will probably find that there are many wonderful opportunities available to you and that you will feel a sense of relief that you're no longer at your previous job. But right now you may be feeling very strongly about this event.



This will turn out to be a positive experience for you, even if it does not seem so right now. Our clients usually end up landing better jobs after they have been separated from or have quit a former position. Why? Because we help them to step back and re-evaluate their interests, desires, and skills and to realize that they can find a better company and better environment to meet their needs. They have the opportunity to analyze all the events, players, and atmospheres at their former companies, and then decide to be very selective and strategic about the new environment they choose. If they

had too much responsibility but not enough authority or resources at the last company, or if they found that they had a serious personality or style difference with a former manager, they now have the chance to wipe the slate clean and start over. Clients who have been working at companies that were financially constrained and continuously downsizing become amazed when they go to work for organizations that are expanding. Suddenly, they can order a new workstation, do that new ad campaign, or hire those assistants. Co-workers are cheerful, energetic, eager to team up for projects. Employees are appreciated for their experience and ideas. Work becomes fun again.

So, although it is easy to feel discouraged at this stage of the game, it is important to realize that it is just a phase on the way to new and better opportunities. In the meantime, this section is designed to give you some tactics and information to help you through this process of transition. Let's look at all the details to consider when losing or quitting a job.

Detail #1: A Severance Package

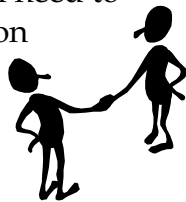


Human Resources departments at most companies are getting quite sophisticated about outplacement these days, and will most likely be

as reasonable or generous with you as possible regarding a severance package. If you and your former manager are not on good terms and cannot negotiate a package without starting an argument, try to arrange a meeting with the Human Resources Director. They are usually experienced with terminations and can maintain a calm, dignified, and fair perspective. The HR executive will have determined in advance what the company is able to offer you in severance salary in order to help you make a smooth transition. Typically, you will be given a severance package consisting of severance pay (any amount from two weeks on up is standard), COBRA health benefits paid for a period of time (one to three months is what we are currently seeing), and some form of outplacement.

Detail #2: Get Your Story Straight

You and the company will need to decide on the official reason for your leaving, and on what message you and your former manager will communicate to the employees still there. Also, now is the time to clarify what kind of reference the company will give you. Most companies prefer that all reference checks go directly to the Human Resources department, so that the company can best control the process and avoid having a manager or coworker give out any negative or inaccurate information that could potentially open them up to litigation. However, your former manager will



probably end up giving you a reference over the phone to a potential employer anyway. You need to negotiate with him about what he will say. If he was dissatisfied with your performance, often waiting a few days after the termination before you talk to him will allow him to calm down. Then, he will most likely want to say something nice in order to help you move on. Have him agree on some accomplishments that he can bring up, and some adjectives he can use. After this conversation, which usually takes place on the phone, fax him a written summary of the agreement. Have a friend “shop” your references later to make sure that he is complying with the agreement.

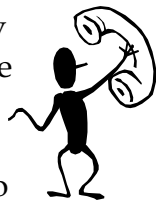
Detail #3: Unfinished Business

If you still have personal items left in your former workspace, or information that you want, arrange with human resources to either go pick it up or have it shipped to you. Make sure you take back possession of any equipment you have lent to the company such as large screen monitors or scanners, and that you promptly return and get a receipt for any equipment that the company has lent you such as laptops or a cell phone. Returning to the office can be intimidating to do alone, so if you have to return to the office to pack up your things, consider bringing a friend or having a friendly coworker accompany you. Don't be surprised if your manager insists on either watching you pack, or having a security guard do so. Ending relationships is extremely difficult for most people to do even under the best of circumstances. Ending employment can make a painful romantic break up

look like a picnic. Expect that people will not be on their best behavior, with the exception of you. Now is the time to hold your tongue, be noble, take care of yourself, and get out without burning any bridges. In all probability you will be seeing these people again. By avoiding unpleasantness you can leave people with a positive feeling about you, and also gain confidence knowing that you dealt with an extremely difficult situation in a classy and dignified way.

Detail #4: Voice Mail

Extra items to negotiate in a severance package will include continuing your company voice mail for one or more months. Change the message to say, "Hello, this is John Smith. I am no longer at XYZ Company. If you are calling regarding XYZ Company business, please call Mary Jones at extension 123. If you are calling regarding a personal matter, you can reach me at my home number, 123-1234." At home, immediately invest in voice mail if you do not already have it. Now is not the time to play around with poor quality recording devices. Put your name on the outbound message, and make it sound professional. If you have a spouse or roommate or children who use the same phone line, seriously consider getting a business line for the duration of the job search. Your next job will depend on your availability and professionalism now.



Detail #5: Unemployment Insurance

Register for unemployment immediately. If you have been given a lump sum severance pay, this will not interfere with collecting unemployment. If you are on salary for another month or so, you will probably need to wait. Unemployment in California is approximately \$900.00 a month—enough to pay for food for a family of four, or perhaps rent for a single person. Not a lot of money! However, the purpose of unemployment is to help honorable, hard working people, including professionals, find another job that is right for them so that they are not forced to take the first job they find. Do sign up by phone immediately. You will have a one week waiting period after signing up, so try to get it over with right away. You will be expected to mail in a form once a week for the duration in which you collect. Benefits continue for 26 weeks. If you consult in this period, simply put on the form that you did receive a paycheck for that week, and it will not count against the 26 weeks. To find the correct phone number for your region, look in the government white pages under Employment Development Department.

Detail #6: Email

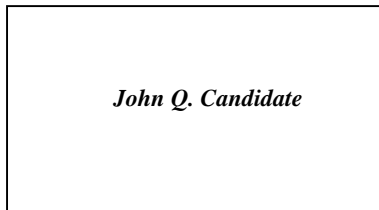
Ideally, you would be able to have your office Email continued for some length of time. If not, evaluate your home Email system and address in the same way that you have done with your



phone and voice mail: does it present you professionally and do you have unlimited access to it? Your Email address should be easy to remember and understand. For this reason, avoid numeric addresses such as 707234764@compuserve.com! For example, jsmith@best.com is easy to get right. If you are now choosing an Internet provider, consider getting one with a flat rate for unlimited hours. You will find yourself spending a lot of time online sending resumes and letters through Email, and researching companies and web sites.

Detail #7: Business Cards

As soon as professional contacts hear that you are in the job market, they will ask for your new business card. If you



use the old ones from your former company, you will have to

cross out so much information that the card will look messy and will emphasize that you have left the company. Invest in some nice new ones right away. A large box of printed business cards will cost about \$120.00, or you can get copied ones for about \$35.00. Choose the highest possible quality linen paper, in white, off-white, or gray. If you are in graphic design or advertising, make some kind of a statement that people will remember with your card, such as using a unique font or having white printing on a black card. Your cards need to say who you are, how to reach you, what job function you fill (software

engineer, marketing management, sales leadership), and perhaps your industry.

Detail #8: What to Tell Whom

In any job search, people you already know or have heard of are your best resources. Thus it is important to decide immediately how you are going to present yourself and your situation to the people with whom you come into contact. We advise that you divide everyone you know into two groups: people to network with and people who can give you emotional support.

The Networkers



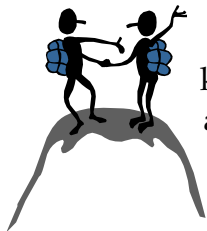
With these targeted networking people, you cannot afford to come across as angry, depressed, or unfocused. These people need to have complete confidence in you so that they can refer you to expanding companies.

Your network contacts hear the good news: that you have left your former company or will be leaving for whatever reason, and you are delighted to be looking for a new opportunity. You are looking for a position designing widgets, or a position as plant director of a widget manufacturer, and whom do they know that you should talk to? To these people, you must come across as upbeat, focused, positive, and confident. If they get a hint of sadness or anger, they will avoid you like the plague. People tend to think of career transition like tuberculosis. They avoid you because they think it is contagious. So it is up to you to tell them how to interact with

you. Say to them that you have good news, you are leaving XYZ Company, and you would like their help in finding emerging companies in your industry. Tell them specifically how they can help you and how you would like them to treat you. An example of this is when a young, unmarried woman announces that she is pregnant, she will preface the news with either, "I have great news..." or "I have some disturbing news that I will handle as best as possible."

The Support System

The idea of having a support system is to be able to blow off some steam and get support from people who are not your professional networking contacts. Everyone needs someone to talk to when they are under stress, even members of the clergy! A minister told us the story recently of how he realized that he was absorbing his parishioners' problems during the day at work, and then transferring them to his wife at home in the evening. But who was she supposed to get support from, the family dog? Their two-year old? So this minister decided to build a support system for himself. He contacted a number of people that he knew and trusted, and asked them for permission to contact them



periodically using this statement: "Joe, this is Pastor Smith. I'm having trouble with something. I could use someone to listen to me for say, fifteen minutes. If you're not busy right now, would you do this for me? If you are busy, I'll call someone

else. You don't need to do anything for me, just listen." Getting support from other unemployed people is a double-edged sword. Yes, they know what you are going through. But you may be having enough trouble keeping yourself upbeat without having to keep them going too. Groups like Experience Unlimited are very helpful for some people who enjoy the structure of a weekly meeting and some mandatory volunteer work. Others find it helpful to talk to a friend, therapist, or their career counselor. Our staff is very sympathetic to the difficulties involved in the job search process, and is willing to listen. The point of a support system is to have a safe place for you to discuss and express all of the difficult emotions that arise naturally when going through a stressful time. Having this kind of support allows you to present yourself much better in networking and interview situations.



Detail # 9: Hurry Up and Wait



Consider waiting a few days after the transition before you go after your best networking contacts. You want to make sure that any initial anger has passed, so that you do not end up criticizing your former company, and thus coming across as angry to the interviewer. Also, you will appear much more focused and professional if you have taken the time to reflect on your accomplishments, new goals, and needs. Start off contacting some less important companies, so that if you stumble in your presentation, it will not matter as much.