

C-Suite Strategies (A Special Report) --- You've Quit. Now What Do You Do? The time between when you've given notice and when you leave can be tricky. Here's how to manage it wisely.

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FULL TEXT

You've given notice. But you're still stuck working at the company for a stretch of days or weeks.

What do you do with that time?

It is awkward to continue work when you know, and everyone else knows, that you're leaving. Yet it is a critical period, because the way you exit leaves a final impression on your bosses and co-workers.

As someone who has studied resignations for the past decade, I have observed that departing employees commonly underestimate the difficulties inherent in navigating the notice period. They often put a great deal of time and thought into deciding whether to quit and how to deliver the news, but very little into how to manage the emotions the move will stir up – or the reactions they will get from peers.

Leaving on a high note – such as helping the company find a replacement – can burnish your reputation. But slacking off can give you a bad name that sticks with you for a long time.

So, it is crucial that employees should prepare for the challenges of the notice period. Here are some tips, based on my research.

Manage your emotions

The notice period is what is known as a liminal space, a transition between a worker's current role and what comes next. One hallmark of this time is experiencing positive and negative emotions simultaneously.

Immediately after resigning, the most common emotion that employees experience is relief. But employees often report feelings of sadness and guilt at the same time, as well as some nostalgia and regret.

Feeling socially isolated is also common. For example, as departing employees attend meetings during this period, they will find that the meetings often focus on a future that doesn't include them – leading to feelings of being left out. And alongside the excitement about moving on, departing employees may experience fear about the next chapter of their careers.

Employees with whom I have spoken tend to anticipate the positive emotions they will feel after resigning while overlooking the negative ones. Employees should try to anticipate the emotional lows and to manage the ambivalent emotions. They should seek out friends who can help them with these ups and downs, or simply start a journal where they can express these emotions.

Expect unusual reactions

Exiting employees should be ready for unexpected reactions from – and interactions with – colleagues. I have heard multiple instances of employees caught off-guard by bosses who broke into tears upon learning of the resignations. Co-workers may sometimes react negatively or selfishly, asking the leaving employee if their boss mentioned who will get stuck with extra duties and who will get the leaving employee's best clients.

Managers need to be extra cautious during their own notice period. Much of a leader's perceived authority will disappear when the resignation becomes public. So, when managers resign, they should talk to their boss about the succession plan, and then one or both of them should clearly communicate that plan to subordinates.

Give the right amount of notice

Employees should not default to the common "two weeks' notice" time frame. In many cases, two weeks is woefully inadequate, while in others, it may be too much. Departing employees should consult the company's policies, as well as think about the notice periods of co-workers who resigned recently – and how others reacted to those time frames.

Second, people should consider how much notice is needed to minimize disruption. In jobs where schedules are planned far in advance, such as education and healthcare, employees may need to provide one to two months of notice to minimize disruption to your co-workers' schedules.

Finally, employees should consider how long they are willing to work once their resignation is made public. Long notice periods are often awkward – the exiting employee and company have both moved on psychologically, but the person is still hanging around, leading to mixed feelings and questions on everyone's part.

Have a communication plan

My research with Mark Bolino at the University of Oklahoma's Price College of Business indicates that notice periods often begin with a resignation meeting, in which employees inform their boss of their intentions and explain why they are leaving. Afterward, it is critical that employees control the messaging about their plans – or else leaders might miscommunicate details, intentionally or not.

But controlling the message can be challenging. So, employees should craft a plan for texting, calling or emailing former co-workers after the resignation meeting. In other cases, it makes sense for employees to work with their boss to create a plan.

Finish work before you go

Often, bosses will handle the process of handing a departing employee's duties to other co-workers. The resigning employee just needs to execute the handoff and train their replacement.

It is more complicated to figure out how to wrap up projects. It may be tempting for employees to commit to more than they can accomplish. But the notice period is a time of distractions and interruptions that can affect the quality of work. A better strategy is to work with one's boss to identify one or two critical projects to wrap up, and focus on providing a high-quality finish to those.

During this wrap-up period, employees should look for opportunities to do good. For example, an employee may have a co-worker who has complimented their desk chair; why not take the opportunity to gift it to them?

And finally, if there is a goodbye party, it provides an amazing opportunity for departing employees to publicly express gratitude to each individual who contributed to their development.

The notice period is challenging, but it is also full of opportunities – to strengthen relationships, do great work and leave a positive legacy. By planning for the notice period in advance, departing employees can create positive momentum for themselves and their former organizations.

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Giving Notice

A survey of how roughly 250 people gave their employers notice shows little consistency in how they went about it.



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