

Judging the Best Time to Move to Another Job

By BNET Editorial

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With all the options open to people today, it's become unusual for anyone to stay in one job or even at one organization for their whole career. However, it takes a lot of thought, preparation, and courage to make the decision to move on. But when you feel you've gone as far as you can in your current position, it might be time to seek out other roles that will bring you new challenges and greater satisfaction.

Common reasons for moving on are:

- Your job turns out to be different than advertised.
- Your job isn't interesting to you anymore.
- There are few opportunities for advancement or development.
- You're not given enough support in your job.
- The organization's values or ethics do not match your own.
- You feel that you have often been treated unfairly by your boss or colleagues.
- Stress levels are too high.
- Grievances are not dealt with professionally.
- There seem to be better situations elsewhere.

It can be difficult to recognize the right point at which to leave a job. Change is always risky and you want to make sure you are making the right decision. The main thing is to be clear about what is important to you. Once you've established your priorities and goals, you will have a much easier time coming to a decision.

What You Need to Know

How can I be sure this is the right time to leave my job?

You want to know that you are ready to make the change before leaving something familiar for something that you are unsure of. For financial and psychological reasons, most people wait until they have found another job before they hand in their notice. No one wants to be adrift without income or a place to go on Monday morning. However, sticking it out in a nightmare situation may be a mistake, as it can sap your energy and adversely affect your health. Leaving in order to job hunt requires confidence and courage and isn't possible for everyone. If you do decide to do this, however, you will have more time to focus on the future and find the right next position.

How do I go about researching the job market?

The Internet is a fantastic resource for research of this type and there are many job-related sites online. These allow you to target your search by industry, job title, salary, and location. Simply talking to other people is another effective way of exploring the job market. People generally like being asked their opinion and are usually good at making associations based upon what they know about you. They might see links or patterns that you haven't noticed, or they may have come across occupations that you've never even heard of. Strike up conversations with friends, family, ex-colleagues, and ex-bosses—anyone you can think of—and tell them you are considering the future and thinking about the variety of options that might be open to you. Briefly explain your main interests, skills, and strengths and ask them what jobs they can envision you doing well. The information you get may be interesting, stimulating, and surprising, but don't take any of it too seriously until you have followed it up with some research of your own.

What to Do

Acknowledge Your Feelings

Making a decision to leave your job is an emotional as well as a rational process, so take time to be sure of how you feel about what you are about to do. Think about what your main concerns are and how strongly you feel about each of them. Describe in writing your reactions to each issue that you are facing, using as much detail as possible. When you're finished, review what you have written and try to understand what has prompted these emotions. This process is important regardless of whether you decide to stay in your current job or move on. Either way, you'll need to come to terms with your reactions to various job-related stresses and find strategies for coping better in the future. Once you've dealt with these issues and emotions you can start afresh and leave old insecurities and problems behind.

Identify the Criteria for Your Ideal Job

In order to ascertain what's most important to you in a job, it may help to break down the different aspects, keeping it realistic and bearing your long-term career plan in mind. This will give you a list of criteria that you can use to weigh your current role against any offers you may get in the future.

Start with a blank sheet of paper and divide it in four. List what you would be looking for in an ideal world in terms of the following questions:

- What kind of organization would you be happiest working for? Some factors to consider are size, sector, physical and cultural environment, philosophy, attitude to staff, prospects for learning new skills, and opportunities for promotion.

- What are the ingredients of the ideal job? What would be your main focus, type of activity, travel, status (full- or part-time), and hours?
- Are you looking for a boss who will be very hands-on, or would you rather work under someone who gives you a lot of discretion to make your own decisions? Do you want a mentor with a consultative style or someone who can give a prescriptive lead?
- What will make up your ideal package? What would be your basic pay, bonus, vacation allowance, and sick leave? Would you be entitled to health care benefits and a pension? Factor in what you'd want in terms of a relocation package (if appropriate), flexible working options, and overtime.

As an example, here's a completed reality check for someone who works in HR.

Elements of the ideal organization

- Charismatic leader with a vision that is realistic
- Communicates a clear strategy...and then sees it through
- Tangible products/services or output
- Meaningful products or services that I can take pride in
- Not a status-driven organization
- HR represented on the board
- Respect for employees
- Well appointed premises
- Efficiently run

Elements of the ideal job

- Working within a team, able to generate ideas off each other
- Friendly co-workers (possibly socialize outside work)
- Variety and innovation
- Stimulating work with plenty of challenges
- Opportunities for advancement
- Some elements familiar or drawing on procedures and methods I already know
- Using my current HR expertise
- Good communication between the various parts of the business

Elements of the ideal boss

- Knowledgeable
- Provides clear direction, then hands-off

- Supportive, able to mentor
- Manages the boardroom relationships well
- Imposes deadlines
- Direct but caring
- Empathetic, sensitive
- Appreciative
- Great motivator

Elements of the ideal package

- \$60K salary, plus
- Pension plan
- Medical insurance
- Car and parking
- 2 weeks' vacation to start
- Family-friendly policies
- Flextime, so I'm not tied to 9–5 every day

Rate Your Current Job

The next step is to take another sheet of paper and divide it in the same way. Now that you've identified the criteria you're looking for in an ideal job, you can rate your *current* job on each of these items, using a scale of 1–10, where 10 is ideal and 1 is totally unacceptable. It's helpful to add comments for each rating too, as you think about what it would take to make things better, how likely it is that changes will occur in the near future, and the extent to which you have some control over the situation.

When you review your scores and comments, you may find that only one or two items have become real problem areas, and that if you can find a way to improve these, it may be worthwhile staying. Perhaps you can use your reality check to talk through the issue with your boss. If you decide to do this, try to keep the discussion positive. Remember to balance any suggestions about what you want or need from a position with what you like about your current job or organization, as well as what you are contributing and what your employer is getting in return.

If, on the other hand, you see several areas where your present position is just not working for you, and it doesn't look like things are going to change anytime soon, it's probably time to cut your losses and find an alternative.

Review Your Options

Now it's time to take a good look at the market. Until you are clear about what is out there and available to you, it's impossible to weigh the decision properly.

Work through a list of options and possibilities, asking yourself for each one: what more do I need to know about this to decide if it's right for me? Then think about how you will get that information: you could use a personal contact, the Internet, or a professional body, for example. When this list is finished use it as a checklist so that you can target the relevant next steps. As you look into the options, some will start to look more and more interesting and realistic while others may have barriers or sticking points. Sometimes writing a practice letter of application will give you clues as to whether you are really interested in and qualified for a particular job. As you continue your research, the list usually gets shorter as some options prove to be impractical, but you may discover other possibilities as you go—it all depends on you, what you want, and what's available at any given time.

To being with, you may want to concentrate on your local job market. Look carefully through newspapers, call two or three recruitment agencies, and visit local companies' Web sites. Finally, think about the timing. Do you feel compelled to change jobs immediately, even if the market is at its most competitive? Or can you afford to stick with your current situation until the market picks up and your chances of getting the job you want increase?

Make Your Decision!

Using all the information at your disposal, analyze the pros and cons.

- *Benefits*: how would I benefit from staying in my current position?
- *Risks*: what would I be risking if I decided to stay where I am?
- *Advantages*: what are the advantages to me of moving on?
- *Implications*: what are the implications of leaving this job?
- *Timing*: is now the best time for this move?
- So...taking everything into consideration, *what is my decision?*

What to Avoid

You Leap at the First Offer You Get

Let's say you're fed up with your current job and you've received an offer for something that looks better. Should you accept it? That all depends. It could turn out to be an excellent fit for you, or it

might be a big mistake. While it's understandable that you want to get away from an unbearable situation, if you've rushed into a decision without enough thought, you're bound to be disappointed. Do a thorough reality check on yourself and the job and politely request enough time to get the information you need. Don't rely on promises made in the job advertisement or by your prospective employer. Before making any commitments, ask to speak with some members of the team or department you'll be joining, in order to satisfy yourself that it is the right decision for you.

You Don't Bother to Negotiate

If you are anxious to get going in a new job, you may be tempted to accept what is offered without thinking about whether it meets your needs. However, it's important to ask yourself the following questions:

- Will I be happy with this package in 6 months' time?
- Is this pay above or below the average for the market?
- Are my future colleagues making about the same amount as what I will be getting?
- Is this the right level of pay for someone with my skills and experience, and for the amount of responsibility I'm taking on?
- Will I still be happy if I end up working a lot of overtime?

You may find elements other than the benefits package that you're not completely satisfied with, such as the scope of your responsibilities and how much latitude you are given in decision making. It's best to wait until you get the written contract to tackle these issues. Once you've identified the areas that you want to discuss, call your future employer to ask what can be done to improve these components of the job. Make it clear how interested you are in the position, so that your questions and suggestions won't be interpreted as an ultimatum. Remind them of what you'll be bringing in terms of skills and strengths, and of the ways in which the role fits your profile. Then allow those in charge some time to come back to you with an adjusted offer.

Where to Learn More

Book:

Jansen, Julie. *I Don't Know What I Want, But I Know It's Not This*. Penguin, 2003.

Web Site:

totaljobs.com: www.totaljobs.com

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