

Counteroffers

Your foot's out the door but your boss wants you back

You've just landed a new job, and the offer on the table looks tasty. But your current boss has other plans, and dangles in front of you a compelling incentive to stay where you are – perhaps a promotion, but usually cash. What do you do?

In recent years, conventional wisdom held that accepting such a counteroffer was equivalent to driving nails into one's career coffin; over 80 percent of candidates who accepted counteroffers were gone just a year later.

Employers have loosened up a bit during recent years, due largely to a shortage of good employees. Employers, desperate to hang onto top talent in this tight labor market, have been using counteroffers with increasing frequency. But despite a rise in employers using the tactic, employment experts around the country agree accepting counteroffers is usually a bad career move.

For starters, your boss may take your resignation personally. Or your boss might throw a guilt trip your way, questioning your loyalty and wondering aloud, "how you could do this to him." Keep in mind what your boss is really thinking: "If I lose this person I'll have to pick up his slack until a new person is found and trained – which could take weeks or months!" So bumping your salary is an easy way to buy your boss time to plot your replacement.

Employers attempting to keep a good person from leaving have been known to say, "We've got great plans for you, we just didn't share them with you yet." More obvious still is this angle: "We were just about to promote you and give you a hefty salary boost; what a coincidence."

And if your boss approaches you out of the blue and offers you a raise or promotion while you're in the midst of a job search, do a quick mental check: Did you make job hunting calls or write emails while at work? Did you tell co-workers your plans to leave? Your boss might have heard about your plans to split through the grapevine.

If faced with a counteroffer, remember salary is rarely the reason employees look for new jobs. Before accepting a fatter paycheck and staying on board with your current company, take a hard look at what's really bugging you. The largest raise won't fix issues such as environment, lack of advancement and lack of exposure to new skill sets.

There's another reason that often holds employees back, causing them to cling to counteroffers at the last moment: The comfort factor. Accepting a counteroffer is often the easy choice to make, since changing jobs means stress, a new routine, new challenges, etc. Don't be lulled into complacency by this way of thinking. Your career isn't a security blanket, it's a dynamic, constantly evolving play, and you are the lead actor.

Ideally, counteroffers wouldn't be made, as good managers recognize the need for talented employees to grow professionally – a process involving change. But being prepared for the worst will help ensure a smooth transition and departure when you make your next move.

So what do you do when presented with a counteroffer? Start by instantly taking command of the situation. Inform your boss in a cordial yet firm voice that your mind's made up, and you'll do all you can to make the transition process easier. Work out your notice fully, and be professional about your departure. You might still feel awkward during your last few weeks; that's just human nature. But by exiting in a graceful manner, you've hopefully left behind some solid references as well as some friend