

How to resign without burning bridges

Leaving a job that's no longer making you happy is often the right move for your mental health and your career. Whether you've been offered a new role, or you've decided to create space for something better, it's important to [resign professionally](#) and avoid burning bridges where you can.

It's clear that hasn't always happened for many of us – 80% of Australians say it's important to them to leave a job on good terms but one in three say they've left a job on bad terms, research for SEEK reveals.

But leaving a job on bad terms is best avoided if you can, says HR specialist and founding director of [Employii](#), Ella Burke.

“Resigning is a fact of life, and your employer knows this,” she says. “But it's how you go about it that can either open new doors or burn that bridge (and connected bridges) forever.

“You can't control how someone else acts, but you can control how you respond. So even if you hate your boss, and hate your company, and are counting down the seconds until your notice is done – it's in your interest to be professional, respectful, and still focus on building bridges not burning them.”

Think of the big picture when you resign

Michael Berger, director of recruitment firm [Talent Blueprint](#) says it's also wise to consider what burning this bridge could have on your career in the long term.

“A negative exit has the ability to derail future career opportunities in any industry without you even knowing,” he says. “It is a small world and niche industry networks are even smaller, meaning that word travels fast whether it be true or based on hearsay.”

In fact, 35% of hirers say they are less likely to hire someone if they've left a role on

bad terms.

5 steps to resigning without burning bridges

1. Resign face-to-face where possible

“Generally, people find it more respectful for you to resign in person,” she says. “Your emotions, tone of voice and body language humanise you.” So, first let your manager or boss know you’d like to chat when they’re free next, or request a one-on-one meeting with them.

You’re just letting them know you’d like to talk at this stage, but it’s not a bad idea to be prepared to tell them you’re resigning in that moment, just in case scheduling that meeting is tricky. It’s important that they hear about your resignation from you, not from anyone else. If it’s not possible to meet in person, arranging a video or phone call is your next best option.

As for the conversation itself, keep it around the facts. Let them know you’re resigning and give a sense of why you’re leaving. It might be something like, ‘I’ve been offered a new opportunity’ or ‘I’ve decided to pursue a new direction in my career’. Speaking in terms of your values can help, Burke says. “They may not like you leaving but they can understand the ‘why’ behind it.”

2. Show you’re thankful

This conversation is also an important chance to thank your employer. That might be for the opportunity you’ve had to work at the company, or for the guidance they’ve shown you. Even if you’re no longer happy in your role, there’s likely something that you’ve taken from it that you can show appreciation for.

3. Follow up in writing

After you’ve resigned verbally, it’s important to formalise things with a letter to your employer, sent soon after your conversation. You might want to have it drafted before your conversation. [This resignation letter template](#) can get you started.

The letter needs to provide the date of your last day of employment, so make sure you’re giving the required amount of notice. Check your award or contract if you’re unsure how much notice is required – the [Fair Work Ombudsman has more information on this](#).

Giving enough notice gives your employer a better chance of covering your responsibilities, so it can be key to leaving on good terms. “Not giving enough notice can be considered disrespectful and unfair to the rest of the team,” says Burke. “And you also risk your employer deducting funds from your final pay.”

4. Work hard during your notice period

The time between resigning and your last day is key to leaving on good terms.

One reason for this comes down to something called ‘recency bias’, Burke explains.

“Recency bias is when people place more emphasis on experiences that are freshest in their memory, so make them positive! If someone does contact your old colleague or manager for a referral, they’re more likely to provide a reference heavily influenced by your behaviour and performance in the last few weeks.”

“One tip to counteract recency bias - and is generally considered good etiquette - is asking your referee for their permission before you provide their details. This way they have time to reflect on all of your performance and not just remember their last few interactions with you.”

Continuing to perform your role to a high standard, wrapping up projects or offering to train other staff in your duties can all help to leave a positive impression.

5. Continue to support the business after you’ve left

You never know how or when a connection could come in handy, says Burke, so like their posts online, share their successes, connect and refer people when it’s appropriate. “It could be one, two or 10 years down the track, but it can happen,” she says.

How to handle a tough boss when you resign

If your boss is particularly volatile, negative or tricky to deal with, and you’re not sure you will be able to keep things civil, Berger says it’s important to stay professional when resigning, and avoid getting drawn into any discussion about the ‘why’s’ or ‘what ifs’.

He still suggests you resign in person if possible, but that you don’t go into detail over your decision and aim to keep emotion out of the conversation.

“You don’t need to say where you’re going,” says Berger. “And don’t buy into any emotional or negative sentiment from your boss.

“You are moving on to a new position that fulfills your career goals – thanks for everything, end of story. Then you offer to work your [full notice period](#), continue to work to the same professional standards and hold your head high.”

No matter what your plans are for once you’ve left a job, leaving on good terms can only help you in the long run. You never know when and where a contact will pop up in your future, or be connected to someone who knows someone.

And while not every boss creates an environment that encourages a positive exit, leaving in a professional way means you can hold your head high.

Source: Independent research conducted by Nature of behalf of SEEK, interviewing 4800 Australians annually. Published March 2024

Read more:

- [How to resign the right way](#)
- [Farewell message to a colleague: 20 ways to say goodbye](#)
- [Free resignation letter template](#)