

How to quit a new job if something better comes up

So, you've landed a job, signed on the dotted line and you're all set to start your new role. Then you get a call that the dream job you'd given up on is now on offer. You're keen to take up this dream opportunity, but you don't want to burn any bridges—or break any contract laws. Here's how three employment experts suggest you handle it.

The employment lawyer

A sensible place to start is to check the agreement you have already signed off on. “You need to look at the terms of the agreement to determine whether you owe your employer any legal obligations on departure,” says Arthur Hambas, lawyer at McDonald Murholme.

He says typically contracts will specify a minimum period of notice which must be given by the departing employee.

Your contract will outline if you've signed up on a fixed or maximum term contract. A maximum term allows you the right to terminate your contract by giving notice, while a fixed term does not.

“It's rare for employers to litigate if you do decide to break the terms of your contract before starting, but it does happen. This is typically in situations where an employer can show significant loss occasioned by the breach,” he says.

The human resources professional

Arguably the bigger risk in bailing out on a job you've already accepted is the potential hit to your reputation. With that in mind, Andy Pope, Principle at Contingent says you should be very sure your dream job is worth it.

“It’s worth noting we work with a lot of contractors who experience the most growth or satisfaction in roles that weren’t always initially that attractive,” he says. “It’s also true you are often making decisions about what job is or isn’t your ‘dream’ with a very low amount of information about what life will be like day-to-day in either role.”

He recommends taking stock of what you do and don’t know about both roles, especially focussing on the learning, development, progression, and industry connection opportunities.

If you want to take the new opportunity, Pope recommends you prepare comprehensively before contacting the original job, having polite and professional answers prepared. “Explain that you have respect for that company and their time however hope that they can understand that in these exceptional circumstances you feel you need to take another role,” he says.

The recruiter

Taking the dream job doesn’t have to dent your reputation if you do it thoughtfully, says Narmie Thambipillay, recruiter at Arjan Consulting.

She recommends calling the recruiter first to talk through the decision—sometimes the original employer will endeavour to match the various benefits the ‘dream’ job does, depending on how much they want you.

That said, if you are going to take the dream job, bear in mind there are often multiple people suitable for the job, and a simple chat is all that’s required to clean your slate and your availability. Thambipillay also notes as inconvenient as it may be upfront, employees that do skip the dream job are far more likely to leave the role if the dream job comes up again.

“Most recruiters will make a note that they accepted and then pulled out, however, if the person has been honest about their job search and the various stages, the recruiter would have been aware this may happen. It’s when someone goes missing in action after accepting the role that they’ve really burnt their bridges,” she says.

Tempted by a better offer? Here’s the go-to guide to handling it:

1. Identify what you do and don’t know about each role to be clear on what both actually offer.
2. Check the contract you’ve signed and [seek legal advice](#) if you’re concerned.

3. If you've signed up through a recruiter, get in touch and talk it through.
4. If you decide to take the 'dream' offer, be upfront and let them know as soon as possible.