

# The end of the road: preparing the candidate for resignation and counter offers

**T**here are many reasons why job offer delays lose candidates. Candidates sometimes find more attractive offers. They change their minds about leaving their present employer. They receive an unexpected raise or promotion. They forget the positive things they saw in your company.

Or most importantly, they feel you are not interested if you don't continue communications to help them through this transition period. Once you have decided who you are going to hire and what you are going to offer, please stay in touch with the candidate after the offer has been accepted, right up to the start date. All of us have a tendency to rethink our decisions. Your candidate certainly will, and when you throw in the possibility of added pressures resulting from counter offers, it can get hard for a candidate not to re-consider all possible options. You want to make sure previously un-thought of questions aren't creating doubt or that buyer's remorse doesn't creep in and derail your efforts before the start date. The best transitions happen when there is frequent, open, and honest communication with the candidate. By staying in touch during this two- to four-week period (before the start date), you begin to cement the re-



lationship and make sure the candidate is prepared for the resignation process and knows how to deal with potential counter offers.

## REMOVE OFFER CONTINGENCIES AS FAST AS POSSIBLE

Most job offers have contingencies that must be removed before the start date or shortly thereafter. The most common are reference checks, background checks, physicals, and/or drug screens. These should all be completed as quickly as possible. Often candidates will not resign from their current position until all contingencies have been officially removed and a start date is locked in. The longer these contingencies take to complete the more time you allow the new hire's current employer to make a counter offer or the candidate to go on competing interviews that lead to new offers that could derail your best laid plans. Following are a few of the most common items, issues, and/or contingencies that typically need to get completed and signed off on between the time an offer is made and a new hire starts the job.

Attach this checklist to the offer letter with information about how they will be removed to allow the candidate to be an active member in the contingency removal process.

- Receipt of the Candidate's Signed Offer Letter;
- Confirmation of Immigration, Visa, and Work Permit Information;

- Successfully passing a Drug and Alcohol Screening;
- Completed Background Checks;
- Completed Reference Checks.

Include the new hire in the process that follows the offer presentation and acceptance in order to ensure all offer contingencies are removed as quickly as possible.

## SHARE RESIGNATION TIPS

Assuming that your new candidate can handle the process of resignation and all the pressures that come with dealing with counter offers is a mistake. Most candidates have little experience preparing for the resignation process and can become stressed and anxious during this stage of the process. Candidates are often unsure about when it's best to give notice, what to expect from their boss and peers, and how to handle counter offers. It's up to your new hire to end his relationship at his former employer as professionally as he began it. Tell the candidate to write a letter that expresses his thanks for the opportunity his former employer extended but that explains his decision is irrevocable. Instruct him to put the letter in his own words and to personally hand it or email it to his immediate supervisor. The candidate should be pleasant but firm. The best time to give notice is immediately after all contingencies have been removed and a start date has been set. All new employers are anxious to get the new employee started, but remember two weeks notice is almost always considered the norm.

Here's some food for thought you can share with your candidates to help them feel more at ease as they prepare to resign:

- Review resignation requirements – the general rule is to give two weeks notice;
- Always prepare a written letter and hand-deliver it or email it to the direct manager.



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Patrick Ropella is Chairman & CEO of the Ropella Group an international Executive Search, Leadership Transformation, and Corporate Consulting firm. He authored the book and web-based training program, *The Right Hire – Mastering the Art of SMART Talent Management*, and has seen his content featured in many trade magazines, business publications, and industry journals. Patrick regularly speaks at webinars, career fairs, and conferences.

A key sentence in the resignation letter is: "I've carefully considered my decision and do not wish to discuss counter proposals." If the candidate really has made a strong decision to join your organization and holds tightly to this sentence throughout the resignation process, it typically will take a great deal of pressure off of the candidate; – Allow the manager to read the letter first so the candidate can gage the response. Once the resignation is delivered, there is no guarantee that the current employer won't try to convince their departing employee to stay, and there's no guarantee that your new employee won't listen to their counter proposals. Be prepared to support and encourage your new hire in these situations.

### LOGIC MUST PREVAIL

As a professional, career decisions must be made objectively, free of emotional pressures. Others, especially the new hire's soon-to-be former employer, will try to influence him. If his current employer attempts to keep him, the candidate might be flattered, but remind the candidate there are reasons he wanted to leave his current employer in the first place. And the issues behind those reasons have probably not been resolved simply because the candidate received an offer to work at another organization.

There are three typical possibilities for what could occur when the candidate gives notice.

- The resignation letter is ignored and the employer goes straight into discussions about why the organization still needs the employee, why he should stay, and whether there is anything the company can do to convince him to stay;
- The resignation letter is accepted and the employer states that the company does not believe in counter offers and requests to professionally work out the two weeks notice so everyone parts on a positive note;
- The employer asks the employee to pack up his things with a witness looking over his shoulder and escort him to the door within the hour.

All three scenarios are very manageable if the candidate is prepared in advance. Remind your new hire that no matter what, he should not offer to explain in any significant detail behind his decision for leaving or why he is going to the new job, as that just opens the door for debate. If the third scenario occurs, the new organization should have a plan in place to bring the new employee on as soon as possible. The sooner the new employee comes on board, the sooner the organization will know it made it through the tricky period when counter offers, competing job offers, and contingencies can derail a hire. Also, many people are cash-strapped month to month and in some cases week to week, so should your new employee get escorted to the door be prepared to bring him onto your payroll immediately. Your prepared approach will further encourage the candidate that he made the right choice.

Follow up with candidates after the offer is made and before the start date to make sure the candidate is prepared for the resignation process and knows how to deal with potential counter offers.