



Counteroffers: Accept Them? Ignore Them? The Answer Is Simple!

Marc Mencher
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You were just offered a dream job by the developer across town, you finally got up the nerve to tell your boss that you're outta there, and, lo and behold, he blew your mind by making you a counteroffer. What a nice compliment! Now you need some advice about when it's appropriate to accept. Lucky for you, the answer is incredibly simple...

NEVER!

There, that was easy, wasn't it? But wait a minute. You just got that nice compliment; your boss really wants you to stay, doesn't he?

National statistics show that 89% of employees who accept counteroffers never last six months before getting the ol' heave-ho. How can that be?

Don't Kid Yourself!

It gave you a nice ego boost to get a counteroffer, didn't it? But think about it -- if you are so valuable to your company, why did you have to quit before your employer made you feel wanted? Why did he wait until the eleventh hour to give you that raise you'd requested?

Because the move is purely defensive. Counteroffers aren't about what's best for you; they're about what's best for the company. Counteroffers are made by employers so they, not you, can be in control of the transition timetable.

Think about what happens when an employee gives two weeks' notice. Suddenly it's crunch time for your boss who needs to fill your shoes post-haste. You think he's going to be able to find somebody of your caliber in two weeks? Hah! So rather than get himself in a bind, he'd rather string you along, letting you continue your work while he takes his sweet time reviewing resumes and interviewing candidates, many of whom would gladly step into your shoes in an instant at a lower salary. The wheels are in motion to replace you and you don't even know it. The moment they find that special someone, well, don't let the door hit you in the tush on the way out.

Wait! It Gets Worse!

If you accept that counteroffer and stay, being fired within the next six months isn't even the worst thing that can happen to you. Stick around and you'll most likely be considered untrustworthy, disloyal, and regarded with suspicion. You've already dropped the first shoe by showing management that you're ready to leave; your boss will be waiting for that second shoe to drop when you do it again. And so, when the promotions and good assignments come along, guess who'll be at the bottom of the list? Why would a company invest in someone whose longevity is questionable?

And what about your *next* raise? Don't hold your breath. Companies have strict wages and salary guidelines that managers must follow. Where do you think the money for your counteroffer came from? Could it be that you just got your next raise a little early?



And You Thought You Were So Clever!

Candidates have revealed to me that they never intended to leave their jobs; they claimed to have an offer elsewhere simply to pressure their boss for a higher salary or a better parking spot. But rather than come out and ask for a raise or better perks, they cleverly chose to use what they thought would be a great negotiating tool.

Wrong negotiating tool.

No one likes to bargain with a gun to their head, which is exactly what you're doing when you try this technique. It might take a bit more courage but, believe me, simply asking for a better employment package without making threats will work a whole lot better. That way, you'll remain employed and no one will question your loyalty.

But let's say that your quitting wasn't a ploy to get a raise; perhaps you really do have a good offer elsewhere. You intend to leave and yet you don't want to burn your bridges behind you. What is the best way to deal with a counteroffer should one come your way?

No Means No!

Don't allow a counteroffer discussion to begin in the first place. If your boss suspects there's room for discussion, he'll invest time and resources into enticing you to stay. This can make you feel guilty, making it more difficult to stick to your decision to leave -- even though you know you should.

The best way to shield yourself from the inevitable emotions surrounding your resignation is to be aware of the three-stage process that employers inevitably follow. It may take a few days for the three stages to run their course but, believe me, sooner or later, you'll find yourself in the following conversations which are almost comical in their predictability:

Stage #1: Your boss will express shock and imply that they can't complete the game you're working on without you. Starting to feel guilty?

Stage #2: Your boss will probe. "Who's the new company? What sort of position did you accept? What are they paying you?" Be careful not to disclose too much or you'll be handing your boss the ammo he needs to say things like: "You're going there? I've heard some pretty terrible things about them" or "Sure, the job sounds great now, but you'll soon see what a sweat shop it really is."

Stage #3: Your boss will make you an offer to try and keep you from leaving. "You know that raise you and I were talking about a few months back? Well, I forgot to tell you! We were just processing it yesterday." Yeah, right!

You Don't Need To Be Coy, Roy...

Your resignation should be handled in person, preferably on a Friday afternoon. Before you ask your direct supervisor if you can speak with them privately in their office, clean out your desk and remove all your personal belongings. If you think your company will want you to stick around for two more weeks, you may be in for a shock. Many game companies will escort you off the premises immediately, effectively shutting down your access to your internal network. Don't take



it personally; it's business. They want to avoid your tampering with their systems or giving you time to negatively influence your peers into joining you.

When you announce your intention to resign, you should also hand your supervisor a letter stating your last date of employment. Keep it short, simple, and to the point. No need to go into detail about your new job or why you're leaving. If your company is curious, it can schedule an exit interview, at which time you can hash out your differences. Or not. Remember, it might feel good for a few minutes, but burning your bridges behind you isn't to your advantage.

It's better to limit your comments to the fact that you enjoyed working with the company, but an opportunity came along that you couldn't pass up. Your decision to leave was made carefully and doesn't reflect any negative feelings. You might add that you're sad to be leaving your colleagues, but this is the right next step for your career. Let your supervisor know that you appreciate all that the company has done for you and, if they intend to let you stay another two weeks, you will do everything in your power to make your departure as smooth and painless as possible. Ask how you can be most productive and whether they'd like you to tie up loose ends.

If you find yourself being asked questions like "What makes your new opportunity so much better than your current job?" politely steer the conversation away from your next employer and back to your offer to help in an orderly transition. Make it clear that your decision to leave is final and that you prefer not to be made a counteroffer since you wouldn't want your refusal to accept more money to seem like a personal affront.

Your manager may propose a short-term extension for your exit date. If you're willing -- and if your start date is flexible -- this may be a good way to offset any residual bad feelings. But, if you agree to this, be sure to set down in writing what the conditions of the extension, including the dates, the work hours, the compensation, and the responsibilities. It's really a mini-contract, so get it signed by your manager before you accept it.

One Final Thought

If, despite everything I've said, you're still tempted to accept a counteroffer, stop, take a deep breath, and think about why you decided to leave in the first place.

The reason most people leave their jobs is seldom about money alone. A raise of a few thousand dollars rarely makes up for a 60-hour workweek or insane deadlines, it doesn't shorten your endless commute, and it doesn't free you up from a lack of upward mobility or a boss who can't make decisions.

If you've made every reasonable effort to resolve the things you're unhappy about and nothing improved, it's time to leave. And if you get a counteroffer? Fuhgetaboutit!