

# When Offered a Good Job, Should You Tell Your Boss?

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By Mortimer R. Feinberg and Bruce Serlen

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Being in demand can be a mixed blessing. Suppose you are urged by a recruiter or a credible employment agency to become a candidate for a position at a highly regarded competitor. Besides having anxieties about your qualifications for the new job, or whether it would be an advantageous career move, you are particularly uneasy about how (or whether) to broach the subject with your present employer. This is made more difficult if you enjoy a close and mutually supportive relationship with your present employer, or with your boss in particular.

If you do submit your resume and begin the Interview process, you have no way of being certain you won't get back to your present company. Confidentiality is supposedly guaranteed, but is it? The number of key players in many industries is limited, and those players network.

In light of this, you might decide to keep your predicament to yourself. The alternative is to take your boss into your confidence, figuring it is better to tell him now than wait for him to hear it through the grapevine or accidentally over lunch.

Either way, you still may be open to charges of disloyalty. And if you don't get the new job, or decide in the end that it isn't quite what you wanted, you may find you have jeopardized a bright future at your present company.

How then to proceed? It can be a painful quandary that requires subtle judgment calls. Consider these guidelines:

- **Read the corporate culture.** Is the company environment responsive to people or is it more rigid and formalized? How extensive is the career-development effort, within the firm? If other executives have been recruited out of the firm, how has their departure been viewed?

In some companies, people come and go with regularity. In others, anyone who leaves immediately becomes a nonperson. "Be sensitive to these cultural signs," says Karl Eller, chairman of Circle K Corp., a national retailer based in Phoenix. Then, if you eventually accept an offer, you won't be shocked if you get an unpleasant fare well.

- **Enter negotiations cautiously.** As you begin discussions with the employment agency or recruiter, remember you're entitled to ask how many other candidates are being considered and where you stand in the ranking. James Wesley Jr., president of Summit Communications Group in Atlanta, notes that "recruiters can cast a fairly wide net on many searches."

Ask, too, about the expected time frame for completing the search. Some searches can drag on four to six months. If any of the responses you are given don't ring true, it may be a sign the situation is too precarious, for you.

- **Touch base on your present job performance.** Request a career discussion with your boss, separate from your regular performance reviews. If this raises any eyebrows, simply explain that you've had a 'rush of career anxiety.' You need to know your boss's honest and candid estimation of your prospects. Make no mention at this point of any possible job offer. Whatever input you receive, store it in your mind while you consider whether to proceed further.

- **Realize you may not be able to turn, back.** If you decide in your, own mind that you do not want to leave your present position, be wary of going beyond preliminary discussions with the agency. Once you throw your hat in the ring, it may become increasingly difficult to extract yourself from the process unscathed.
- **Act when an offer is imminent.** Now is the time to raise the subject with your present boss. Don't go in, however, unless you are mentally prepared to accept the, other company's offer and resign. Remember, this is not a negotiation ploy, especially as it concerns your present compensation. Senior management at one broad casting company meets with employees to discuss outside offers, though the cultural > ground rules stipulate that salary shouldn't be an issue.

Can you have a candid, open discussion" with your boss at this point? "Yes." says Carl Dargene, chief executive officer of Amcore Financial Inc. in Rockford, 111., "if your prior relationship has been solid and you act sincerely."

"I appreciate people consulting me," agrees William Schwartz, chief executive of Capital Cable in St Louis. "And in re viewing their career prospects at the company, it sometimes becomes clear they should pursue the other opportunity."

Other chief executives, however, aren't nearly as sanguine. To their minds, any broaching of another offer can poison their relationship with the employee, possibly permanently. The person is no longer considered a team player. The ground shifts. He or she suddenly represents a risk to the organization. "Sure you can have an 'honest' talk with your boss, but it'll be your last," says John Kelly, president of Kelhan Ltd., a marketing promotion company in New York. So know your boss's attitude well before you act.

- Don't count on counteroffers. In a re cent survey, the search firm of Boyden International reported that of 450 managers who changed positions during a 36-month period, 39 received counteroffers. Of these, 27 decided to remain. Their fate, however, was none too rosy. Of the 27 who stayed, 25 were gone within 18 months, having been fired or opting to resign voluntarily!

Why is the outlook on counteroffers so bleak? The company may have felt black mailed and only waited until a more advantageous moment to act The last thing a company wants to do is cave in to one employee's demands. "It can then find it self In a virtual bidding war where every one is attempting the same strategy," says Dennis Bottorff, vice chairman and chief operating officer of Sovran Financial Corp. in Norfolk. Va.

Then, too, deep down the employee may still have unresolved feelings about his or her long-term tenure and ends up leaving within a short time anyway.

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