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# The Property Career Guide



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## MAKING THE DECISION

### Weighing up all the factors

To rush to accept the first offer you receive is ill advised, unless it is the post you have set your sights on from the start or your instinct recommends it strongly. Deciding whether to accept an offer or wait for another, or choosing between several offers, should be approached with the same meticulous care you have applied to the rest of your search.

Firstly, make sure you consider your current employment as an offer – applying the same comparison criteria as any alternative offers. Now, relate these to what you have established as your minimum threshold, in terms of ambition, remuneration and prospects – bearing in mind which of these is most important to you.

Contrast the staffing structures of the firms from whom you have offers. Do you know enough about the ages and plans of the present partners or directors to gauge your own career timing? Does the firm have growth potential? Will it grow as your experience and expertise grow, or will you have to wait while the firm catches up with you? Does it offer partnership/directorship opportunities and how many others will be competing for them?

The partnership/directorship issue may not be important to you at this stage of your career. You may, instead, be looking for a change in career path, or an opportunity to widen your experience. It is most important to know exactly for what you are aiming and to make sure the prospective post has the potential to satisfy you.

If you have been offered the job of your dreams the decision is easy. One method of arriving at the decision that is right for you is to write down the following questions and list your answers:

- What are the positives about the new position?
- What are the negatives about the new position?
- What are the positives about your current position?
- What are the negatives about your current position?



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## Factor in the following elements:

- Salary.
- Benefits (car/pension/ life assurance/share options/etc).
- Career progression/ development.
- Location and travel.
- Culture.
- Hours of work.
- Job satisfaction.
- Security.

Finally, remind yourself why you were looking for a new position in the first place and check that the new role satisfies those reasons? It is also very important to talk the situation through with your partner or an impartial friend – ideally, somebody who is not positioned under your current employer.

## The stages of acceptance

Accepting an offer is more than just saying 'Yes'

First you should agree to terms verbally. By offering you a position, the employer is acknowledging that you can contribute to his firm. Avoid letting gratitude carry you away and so settle for less than you might be able to negotiate in relation to salary and conditions.

Few people like to talk about money. But, to avoid disappointment in the written offer, you should look to agree financial terms prior to having them put in writing. To do this, it is best to get all non-contentious elements out of the way first. Are all other terms of the job satisfactory and as they have been described? Is career progression defined and acceptable to you? Once the field is clear, the subject of money can be raised, first in terms of an approximate figure and then more specifically. Before the session is ended, you should have agreed upon a figure that commits both you and the employer. It is all too easy for either party to lose face at this stage and for the entire negotiation to break down. Consider the employer's viewpoint and take care.

Ask to see the offer confirmed in writing and establish that you expect the employer to refrain from taking up references until you have accepted. References should be no more than double-checking a decision already taken and the employer ought not to prejudice your current situation unnecessarily. In some firms, an offer will be contingent upon either satisfactory references, or the results of a medical examination, or both. You must warn your referees that they will be contacted and by whom. Also, it is wise to confirm what they will say (you may want to offer an alternate!) Make sure you know about and agree to those conditions in advance. You could otherwise find that you have resigned one post, only to have another fall through.

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## Contract of employment

Most employers send out a copy of your employment contract, but some will wait until you start. When you do receive a contract, read it thoroughly and make sure that you understand, and are happy with, the content. It is extremely rare for an employment contract to contain any nasty surprises. However, do be sure to read this important document and take professional advice if unsure about any of the clauses contained.

## Resignation

When you have accepted a verbal offer, you have accepted the position. Such verbal contracts are binding on both parties. The written offer is merely confirmation of the terms agreed.

Write to accept the offer and, at the same time, write your letter of resignation, as a fait accompli. It is now too late to use your offer as leverage for a better salary or conditions with your current employer. Negotiating a counter offer after you have accepted either a verbal or written offer is very unethical, probably a breach of contract, and could taint your reputation in the profession. Before you even consider the new position, you should have thought about your reaction to a counter offer.

Most managers handle resignations very professionally, but some still take departures personally and may try to invoke emotional blackmail ("after all we've done for you"/"you're leaving us very short staffed", etc). Even worse, although very rare, some managers become aggressive. Do not be drawn into a confrontation; stay polite and to the point.

Handing in your notice can be daunting and something of which many people have little, if any, experience. This brief guide should help you through the process:

### When?

- You should endeavour to hand in your notice at the earliest opportunity; delay can create apprehension and will not endear you to your new employer.
- Always hand in your resignation letter personally - never just leave it on your manager's desk. Under no circumstances should you e-mail your resignation.
- When you ask to see your manager, be prepared for him to see you



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straight away. If they propose a date some way into the future, you must explain the urgency.

Before handing in your notice you should have checked your new employment details and have at least a provisional start date. The section on "your new job" provides further guidance.

## Letter of Resignation

This should be written before you ask for a meeting with your manager. Keep the letter simple, polite and free from innuendo or ambiguous statements, no matter what you think of your current employer. Do not jeopardise your future by risking poor or indifferent references. The letter should be short, factual and acknowledge your employer's contribution to your career. The following sample letter should suffice:

### Sample resignation letter:

Dear

I am writing to inform you of my decision to resign from (name of firm), with effect from today the (date). As I have to provide four weeks' notice, I anticipate that my last working day will be (date). I have some holidays outstanding thus am happy either to depart earlier or to receive payment in lieu.

The position I have been offered more closely meets my career requirements currently and my decision to depart is no reflection on the firm.

I have enjoyed my time (at...), and would like to take this opportunity to thank the firm and you personally for all your support

Yours sincerely,

Don't be tempted to include lengthy explanations, especially of a critical nature, for your resignation; you should be concentrating on your future.

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## Counter Offers

If you expect a counter offer to be made, it is permissible to delay accepting the new offer while you consider your options. If that is the case, make sure to establish and agree upon a specific date by which time your decision must be made. But never, under any circumstances, accept an offer while you are still willing to negotiate with your current employer.

Sometimes an employer may try to 'buy back' your services with a combination of pay increases, promotions and/or promises. You must ask yourself some questions- why did you have to hand in your notice to get the recognition you deserve? Is this just a short-term fix? Does the buy-back meet all the reasons for looking for a new job in the first place?

Be very wary of promises, you will not be able to go back to a prospective employer at a later date. Finally, how will your employer view you in the future, particularly in terms of loyalty?

Of course, there are some buy-backs, which are valid and honourable, but think the situation through carefully.

## Ongoing career management

You should actively review your career every 12 months or so and you should get into the habit of revising your CV on an annual basis. If you are fortunate enough to have encountered a genuinely helpful and professional recruitment consultant they will happily keep you up to date with market conditions.