

Is the Grass Greener? How To Tell

Julie Godshall Brown

So, you've reached a stage in your career where your knowledge, experience, and your client base results in your attractiveness to other firms. How do you decide whether to make a move?

Have you ever heard of the "Benjamin Franklin close"? In its most simplest form, it involves writing down (yes, *writing down!*) the pros and cons of making a career decision in order to weigh the options.

You may ask (or sing), "Should I Stay or Should I Go?" Get out your paper and pencil and consider all of the attributes of each position!

#1 What is the total compensation for each position? (HINT: It is not merely your hourly, monthly, or annual salary.) Make sure that you consider the following elements among others. What is the value of the benefits that your firm offers? In other words, some firms may pay only a portion of your health or dental insurance, but the coverage may be superior to plans of other firms who pay 100% of your coverage. Additionally, look at the other benefits including paid time off, dental, disability, stock options, retirement, car allowance, parking, cost of living/relocation, and other unique perks. Always ask about a potential employer's performance/salary review periods as well.

#2 What is the quality of life that each position affords you? What is the culture of your current firm and the one you are considering? I encourage candidates to ask about the average employee tenure at their firm, the tenure for their particular position, and why the hiring manager feels that they have the tenure that they do. Unless the position is very confidential in nature, ask the hiring manager if they would consider giving you the opportunity to talk with others in the firm. The reaction to the request may itself be enlightening. If you have the opportunity to talk with future coworkers, ask them why they have stayed in their position. Additionally, how much travel is involved? What are typical office hours for professionals in your role? How flexible is management in terms of accommodating your unique family or personal needs?

#3 What are the long term opportunities? Do they match well with your long term goals? If a firm provides many career paths, yet most involve relocation, you must consider whether that works for you and your family. Another example might be your long term goal to work part-time or flex your hours—is this possible with this employer? Is the company owned by outside investors, or committed industry veterans? Often this answer can give you insight to the business strategy, i.e., build up and sell for profit or long term growth. Simply put, the career path is a non-issue if the firm will not be there to support your position.

#4 How is the potential employer viewed in the marketplace? When possible, talk to clients, competitors, suppliers, and industry investors about the firm prior to making a decision. It is critical to know where your potential employer "sits" in the marketplace, and also to understand where their industry is going in the next five to ten years. In the end, you want to understand the firm's reputation for integrity, ability to compete in their market, and their financial position.

#5 How are new employees acclimated to the company? Though many smaller firms may not have regimented training programs, they should at minimum be able to provide you with a comfort level that you will be viewed as an investment for them. Will you be mentored by a top performer or management? Will they invest in internal or external training to ensure your success? After training, what type of support structure is in place to ensure your success?

What does the new firm expect from you within the first six months or one year? Are they hiring you for your client list? It is not uncommon for a firm to hire a sales person strictly for the business that they can bring with them. If you are comfortable with this goal—fine, but it is

important to know before you make a move. Will your credibility suffer due to making multiple moves to represent firms within the same industry in the same market? How long do they expect to invest in your career *before* you become profitable for their company?

A Final note about counteroffers: Many studies have been done regarding the long term success of accepting counteroffers. The bottom line is that accepting a counteroffer rarely yields a positive long term situation for several reasons. Often an employee is not considering a move strictly for monetary gain; therefore, why stay for a monetary gain. Also, once a company knows that you have been "in the market" for a new position, there is a (rightly) perceived lack of loyalty that is very difficult to overcome. Rarely, is acceptance of a counteroffer a positive move for an employee. Often it simply buys an employer enough time to replace the candidate in their own timeframe, rather than without notice. Consider asking your employer for a raise, promotion, or equitable remedy of your concerns prior to looking for a new position rather than accepting an offer only once you have an outside opportunity on the table.

My goal is to raise more questions than answers for you regarding a career move. There are many elements that a professional must consider before making a career change, and I have just touched the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. It is very flattering to be recruited for a new position, and many careers are built on a series of employer changes. The key is to make sure that you make the move only when the grass is actually greener on the other side fence. A professional recruiter can not only assist you in identifying outstanding career opportunities, but can also assist you in evaluating positions thoroughly and objectively.

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