

Dodging the Bullet: Skillfully Considering and Declining a Counteroffer

By Dayna Carr

'It seemed pathetic and terrible to me, and it still does, that men and women work eight hours a day at jobs that bring them no joy, no reward save a few dollars.'

-- Hortense Odlum

What is a counteroffer?

Counteroffers appear after you have accepted a new position and submitted your resignation to your current employer. Should your employer choose to extend a counteroffer, they will try to persuade you to stay with promises of a higher salary or a promotion, and possibly other requests you may have. While most employers will not extend a counteroffer (CNNMoney.com reports that employers do so less than 5% of the time), you need to be prepared to think critically about the offer.

Why did I receive a counteroffer?

- **Control** - Your company wants to be in control. If you accept the counteroffer they extend, they have taken the ball out of your court. While they may have made promises, they are still the ones who control which of those actually come to fruition.
- **Buying Time** - Your company is buying time to find a replacement for you. You've already jeopardized your loyalty. If they can get you to sign another employment contract, they know that they have plenty of time to recruit a new and improved you. This is extremely prevalent in offices where there are already several vacancies.
- **Vacations** - If you leave now, everyone's vacations schedules will be thrown off. While this sounds base and petty, the fact remains that it has encouraged many a counteroffer.
- **Follow the Leader** - After your departure, others in your office may realize that not only are they unhappy in their jobs, but they can do something about it! Now that you've taken the initiative and left, employees who tend to be more timid when it comes to job offers may decide to try something new as well. The last thing your hospital wants is an empty IT department.
- **All About Your Boss** - If you are a good employee, your resignation could reflect poorly on your manager. If he was performing well, you shouldn't have resigned in the first place, but even still, he should have been able to woo you into staying.

Why shouldn't I accept a counteroffer?

Now that we've debunked a few reasons that you might have received your counteroffer, you may be thinking 'my employer isn't like that...they really do just like me!' While that may be the case, you need to stop and think critically about what accepting a counteroffer will say about you and how it will affect career opportunities in the future.

- **You have a price** - Accepting a counteroffer says that you can be bought and/or bribed for the right price. You're only there for the money, otherwise you wouldn't have left in the first place, right? Stop and think about where that money is coming from. Most companies have strict regulations regarding bonuses and raises, so you're probably just getting the raise you would have gotten in 6 months in advance. Also, if you were really worth that extra \$5,000 per year, why didn't your boss give it to you before you quit?
- **No more circle of trust** - You have stepped out of the circle of trust. There is no longer any loyalty between you and your employer. You have looked once, and will probably do so again. In fact, statistics prove just that - the National Association of Personnel Consultants compiled statistics that confirm that over 80% of employees who accept a counteroffer are no longer with the company 6 months later. And even if you do stay the course, you'll be on the bottom of the list for promotions and training opportunities - why would an employer invest in an employee whose longevity is questionable?
- **You were using your employer** - Countless employees have interviewed and received offers simply as a ploy to pressure their current employer into giving them a raise or promotion. While this may not be the case for you, accepting a counteroffer carries this stigma.
- **Burnt bridges** - After accepting a counteroffer, chances are you've burnt three bridges. First and foremost, you've squelched any possibility of working for the company you received the offer from. To accept a position and not show up can sometimes be career suicide - in an industry as close-knit as healthcare IT, word travels fast. Second, you've burnt a bridge with the recruiter you've worked with. By accepting a counteroffer, you have jeopardized their relationship with the client, not to mention the fact that you've just thrown away all the hours of work they put into landing you the job. Finally, you've probably done permanent damage with your current employer. Oftentimes politely declining a counteroffer leaves the door open for a future return, after a much needed break. If you accept, and stay for six months before leaving, you've more than likely closed that door forever.

Making an exit

Now that you've reviewed all the issues associated with the acceptance of a counteroffer, how do you turn one down? It is imperative that the exit from your current employer is handled properly.

First, take time to consider their proposal, regardless of your intent to accept or decline. Ask for a day or two to think it over, as this shows respect for your manager. When preparing your response, be firm, gracious, and to the point. Avoid discussion of where you are going and all the reasons it makes sense.

A graceful exit should consist of a concisely penned note that thanks your company for their offer, states your last available day of work, and offers assistance in readying them for your departure. Be pleasant, but do not leave any room for discussion. Here is an example of what your declination could look like:

Dear Manager,

I greatly appreciate this offer; I feel good about my experience here. However, I cannot accept the offer you have presented to me. I will miss my colleagues and will reflect positively on my time with this company. If my circumstances should change, I would be honored to work with you again. Let's work together to make my transition as smooth as possible, as I want to help as much as possible during our remaining weeks.

*Sincerely,
Your Name*

By handling your exit gracefully, you leave the door open for future opportunities with both your manager and the company.