

BEWARE OF COUNTEROFFERS!!

They may beg you to stay now, then give you the boot later.

You've been approached by another company and offered a position with growth potential and a moderate increase in compensation. You've analyzed and agonized over the decision to leave a good (or bad) job for what could be a better one, and have accepted (or decided to accept) the offer. However, upon resigning, your current boss asks you to stay. This appeal is known as a counteroffer or buyback.

In recent years, counteroffers have practically become the norm. It's almost like a part of the accepted divorce proceedings, and allows the boss to save face with the boss. And sometimes has to take its course.

But while buyback offers can be tempting, take care not to fall into the trap or to be blindsided to your own detriment. Career changes are tough enough as it is, and anxieties about leaving a comfortable job, friends, and location and having to reprove yourself again in an unknown opportunity can cloud the best of logic. But, just because the new position is a little scary does not mean it's not a positive move.

Since buyback gestures can create confusion and buyers remorse, you should understand what's being cast upon you. Counteroffers are typically made in conjunction with some form of flattery. For example:

- *You are too valuable-we need you.
- *You can't desert the team/your friends and leave them hanging.
- *We were just about to give you a raise/promotion, and it was confidential until now.
- *What did they offer, why are you leaving, and what would you need to stay?
- *Why would you want to work for "THAT" company?
- *The President/CEO/VP wants to meet with you before you make your decision.
- *Counteroffers usually take the form of:
 - 1)More money
 - 2)a promotion and more responsibility
 - 3)a modified reporting structure
 - 4)promises of future considerations
 - 5)disparaging remarks about the new company you have decided to go to.
 - 6)guilt trips

Of course, since we all prefer to think we are "MVP'S" it's natural to want to believe these manipulative appeals. Accepting a counteroffer is almost always the wrong choice to make.

Think about it..... If you were worth "X" yesterday, why are they suddenly willing to pay you "X+Y" today, when you were not expecting another raise for some time?

Also, consider how you've felt when someone resigned from your staff. The reality is that employers don't like to be "fired." Your boss is likely concerned that he will look bad, and that his career may suffer. Bosses are judged by their ability to retain staff.

When a contributor quits, morale suffers. Further, your leaving might jeopardize an important project, increase staffers workload or even foul up someone's vacation schedule. It's never a convenient or good time for someone to quit, and may prove time consuming and costly to replace you, especially considering recruitment, relocation expense and lost time. It is much cheaper to keep you even at a higher salary. And it would be better to fire you later, on the company time frame.

"We've made counteroffers on occasion, if a good person approaches the issue professionally." Says a former senior partner of a Big "6" Accounting Firm. "But usually it was a stop-gap measure because we couldn't afford a defection at that point in time." "We didn't count on those people long term and they usually burned a bridge two or three levels up, if not their immediate supervisor. It definitely put them in a career holding pattern."

This person, quoted above cites a conference he once attended with his boss and two subordinate managers, in which they approved a counteroffer and a raise to an employee two levels down. Immediately after that meeting, his boss called and said: "We can't afford to lose him now, but our number one priority is to find his replacement, ASAP, "and he was replaced within a few months.

While your employer may truly consider you an asset and care about you personally, you can be sure that your interests are secondary to your boss's career and your company's profit or survival. Thus flattering offers and comments are attempts to manipulate you to act in your employer's best interests which is not necessarily in your best interest. In other words they are not there about you. Accepting a counter offer can have numerous negative consequences.

Consider... Where did the extra money or responsibility you would get come from? Was it your next raise or promotion, just given early? Will you be limited in the future? Will you have to threaten to leave to get the next raise? Might a cheaper replacement be sought? You've demonstrated your unhappiness (or lack of blind loyalty), and will be perceived as having committed blackmail to gain a raise. You won't be considered a team player anymore. Many employers will hold a grudge at review time, and you could end up at the top of the next reduction in force "hit list." As one executive who requested anonymity says, "Like an adulterous affair that's been discovered, the broken trust is never fully recovered."

Apart from the short term, band aid treatment, nothing will change within the company. After the dust settles from this upheaval, you'll be in the same old rut. A rule of thumb among recruiters is that more than 80% of those accepting counteroffers leave, or are terminated, within six months anyway. Half of those reinitiate their job search within 90 days.

To be sure, recruiters have a vested interest in candidates not accepting "buybacks," since they can not complete a search without willing candidates. Attempted buybacks can demonstrate disrespect for your well thought out decision and commitment to the new

company. Should your current employer decide to eliminate your position or pass you over for promotion, successfully countering their decision is unlikely. Besides, you've analyzed, accepted and committed to the new company, which has surely made plans and accommodations around you and is counting on you. Finally, look at the position as though unemployed. Which is better? Probably the new one, or you wouldn't have looked or accepted in the first place.

(Authored by :R.Gaines Baty)

R.L. Scott Associates, National Healthcare Search