

Knowing when and how to leave your job

When you know it's time to leave, keep it professional.

By Maude McGill, PhD, MSN, RN-BC, and Bobbie Loveless, DNP, MSN, RN, CNE

Jennifer, an RN, has been with the same organization for over 10 years. She's a model employee in the medical critical care unit who knows the ins and outs of the organization and could do her job blindfolded. Recently, Jennifer has been feeling apathetic about going to work. Calling out sick, doing just enough to get by, and superficially getting through the day are becoming common behavior patterns. "I don't know what happened. I love my job and my coworkers. I just don't have the same passion about my job that I used to."

Jennifer faces the dilemma of staying for familiarity and comfort or accepting the challenge of leaving for new opportunities. What should she do?

Do you and your organization fit?

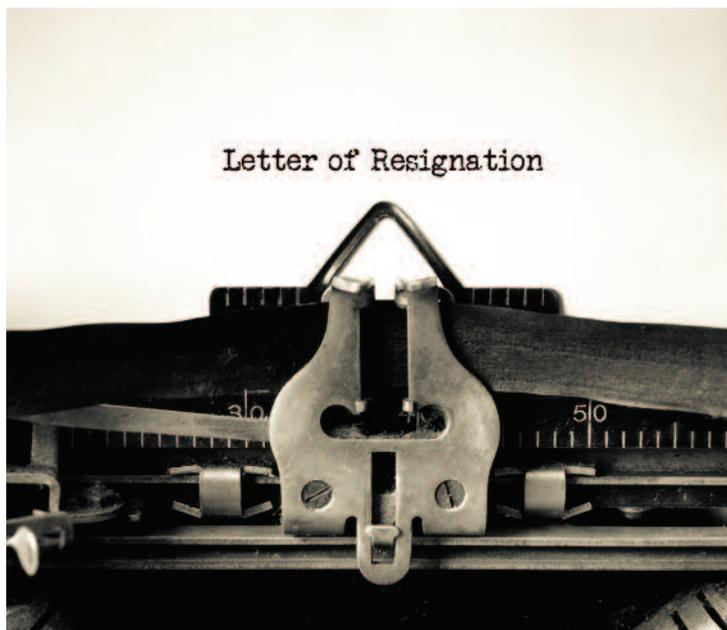
Person-environment (PE) interaction theories have been around for about 100 years. Over time, the concept of PE fit emerged and was viewed as describing the degree to which an individual's and an organization's characteristics are compatible or congruent. Person-organization fit (POF), a domain of PE, addresses compatibility between individuals and entire organizations, not just the job. Individual-organizational similarities are the crux of POF. With the development of the organizational culture profile (OCP), a values-based instrument, value congruence became widely accepted as the defining variable for POF.

Seeking values congruence is a meaningful way to assess how fit with various aspects of the work environment influences individuals' attitudes and behaviors. Outcomes of POF include increased job satisfaction and commitment to the organization, which means a person is less likely to leave. A few examples of OCP constructs include a clear guiding philosophy, an emphasis on quality, opportunities for professional growth, free exchange of information, supportiveness, fairness, and autonomy.

You may realize the existence of poor POF over time or it may occur to you all of a sudden. No matter the speed of the onset, when you think "Oh, my goodness, what am I doing here?" it's time to review. Whether you're a nurse in practice, administration, or education, when you begin to have feelings of disconnection from or incongruence with your organization, you should pause and reassess whether you and the organization are a good fit.

What are the signs?

Fulfillment is a requirement for life satisfaction. Many people spend over half of their adult lives in the workforce—over half of your life in an area that either provides fulfillment or doesn't. The process of being fulfilled goes back to understanding your holistic self. Knowing what makes you happy, what keeps you growing, and what satisfies your desire to be efficient at work is valuable. Conversely, you also need to know the signs of workplace discontent.



Are you feeling stressed and negative about your current workplace position?

Feeling stressed when trying to accomplish tasks is common, but when stress and negativity are affecting your physical health (frequent headaches, tachycardia, change in your overall demeanor) it might be a sign to consider a graceful transition to another opportunity.

Do your cultural and philosophical beliefs differ from those of the organization?

A conflict in your personal philosophical beliefs of workplace structure and harmony with those of the organization can cause frustration. If these differences begin to manifest in ways that affect your workflow, this might be a sign to consider an organization that better mirrors your beliefs.

Are you losing your balance between work and life?

If you're spending less time with your family and not meeting personal commitments because of work, you might consider looking for a job that provides a greater sense of balance.

Are you being challenged?

Nursing is a career that requires lifelong learning. While skill mastery is desired for optimal work performance, you still want to be in an environment that challenges your thinking and provides personal growth. If you're not in a position that fosters growth, you might consider another option that allows for learning opportunities and advancement.

Are you experiencing verbal abuse, sexual harassment, or any other type of illegal behavior?

The workplace should never include incivility, sexual harassment, or any other type of intolerable behavior. If you're experiencing any of these negative actions, it's time to consider a change in employment, if the problem can't be successfully resolved.

How do you leave gracefully?

Learning to leave a job gracefully is vital to your professional life. In 2016, Americans changed employment about every 4.2 years, compared to 2014 when the average person changed positions about every 4.6 years. For certain professions and age groups, the turnover rate is even higher. Experts have suggested that millennials may demonstrate the least amount of employer loyalty, with a job turnover rate as high as every 3 years.

Setting the right tone

Your resignation letter should set the right tone—brief and positive. Use this sample letter as a guide when it's time for you to take the next step in your career.

To: [Supervisor name and title]
CC: Human Resources
 [Organization name]
 [Organization address]
 [Date]

Dear [supervisor]:
 I appreciate the opportunity to work for [organization] for [x years]. I have learned so much during my time here. Unfortunately, I must render my formal resignation as [position]. My last date will be [date].

Deciding to resign has been quite difficult; however, it is necessary for my professional growth and development.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to serve [organization]. I wish you and [organization] continued success.

Respectfully,
 [Signature]
 [Name and title]
 [Contact information]

Regrettably, not everyone considers the value of a graceful transition from one employer to the next. Fear of change and the fact that job or role transition is anxiety provoking may result in behavior that causes employees to burn bridges as they leave.

Given the high rate of job movement, use these rules as a guide to a successful transition.

- Find a mentor or supporter in your organization you can talk with confidentially before you make the decision to leave. Ask this person to help you assess the benefits and risks of a new position as well as the impact that leaving will have on your colleagues.
- After you've made the decision to leave, copy any personal files you might have and begin to remove nonessential items you keep at work. This will save you stress and time in the event that you leave to work with a competitor and are expected to transition quickly. However, don't take documents that are considered intellectual

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property of your current organization.

- Finalize all the details with your new employer before you notify your current employer that you're leaving. The unexpected can happen, and you don't want to find yourself unemployed.

- After the details are settled, tell your manager first, then prepare a brief but positive resignation letter. (See *Setting the right tone.*) This letter isn't the place to complain or voice concerns. If you want to submit a formal letter of concern, draft it separately and submit it to human resources. If you have concerns or suggestions for improvement, a good time to communicate those details is during an exit interview.

- Give adequate notification of your resignation. Some organizations have contracts stipulating employment periods; if that's your situation, plan your departure within the break between contract periods or request to be released from your contract. If you're not a contracted employee, 2 weeks is the standard notice. However, for some positions, such as manager, a longer notice may be more appropriate.
- Develop a transition plan with a timeline for your responsibilities. Consider the timing of assignment completion so that you can determine what will need to be completed by others. If possible, work with your successor to orient him or her. If no successor is apparent, offer to assist in developing standards for possible candidates or redistribution of your responsibilities.
- Ensure professional communication throughout the transition process with both internal and external colleagues. If you're going to a direct competitor, you may be expected to depart as soon as you announce your decision. Be prepared with written notes to give your supervisor about what needs to be covered and who needs to be contacted. If a hasty departure is necessary, demonstrate compassion and verbally offer an apology to your supervisor. Also, be prepared for a security escort and

immediate disconnection from organization communication and files if you're going to work for a competitor. This is standard procedure when an employee transitions to a competitor; it isn't personal, it's just business.

- Show gratitude and humility. Personally communicate with internal and external key people with whom you've worked. Share appreciation for the individual experiences that you've had with them, and ask them for advice about how to be successful in your new role. Most important, thank them for being part of your life and offer to stay in touch.

Don't burn bridges

Most Americans will have multiple jobs throughout their careers, so learning how to leave a job is just as important as learning how to get one. And remember the quote attributed to Walter Winchell (and others), "It pays to be nice to the people you meet on the way up, for they are the same people you meet on the way down." In other words, don't burn bridges when you leave an organization; you may work with these people again in the future.

After some soul-searching and talking with her mentors, Jennifer realizes that although she still enjoys critical care, she wants to transition from adults to children. Unfortunately, there are no openings at her current employer, so she lands a job at another hospital. She leaves on good terms and is soon enjoying her career again. ★

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Ready, set, get hired

Use the nursing process to find the job that's right for you.

By Mary E. Fortier, EdD, RN, CNL

You've graduated. You've passed the NCLEX-RN examination. You're an RN! Now, how do you begin your professional career? What qualities are you looking for in an employer? Have you researched your potential employers? What benefits—personal, professional, and financial—do they offer? Do they have opportunities for advancement? Do their mission and vision statements align with your beliefs? Do they have Magnet® Recognition? All of these questions, as well as the qualities that set you above others looking to fill the same position, should guide your employment decision.

Where should you begin?

Many nurses say, "I need a job, any job." Don't give in to that refrain. You're a nurse—a member of the most trusted profession—and you're the reason patients recover successfully and learn new behaviors to improve their health outcomes and literacy. You're why institutions achieve Magnet Recognition, and you're a key member of the healthcare team. So start by remembering the nursing process.

- **Assessing.** Assess yourself and your potential employers.
- **Diagnosing.** Will these organizations provide an environment that promotes your professional growth?
- **Planning.** Do your research. Who is your potential employer? What qualities will you bring to the organization?
- **Implementing.** Update your résumé, submit applications, meet with recruiters, and follow up.
- **Evaluating.** Make evaluation a life-long process that takes into account new professional and personal goals and priorities.



Ready

Set

Go!

Assessing

When assessing possible places of employment, consider the setting; is it a hospital, clinic, community organization, or school? If it's a hospital, is it a teaching institution or a small community-based facility? Has it achieved Magnet Recognition? (See *Benefits of Magnet Recognition*.)

What does the position require? Do you need an associate degree, a baccalaureate degree, prior experience, or specialty certifications? What's the salary? What benefits does the organization provide—health insurance, retirement plans (and what percentage is matched), paid vacation time, educational benefits (school and continuing education)? What opportunities for professional growth and career advancement do they offer?

Now for the challenging part: self-assessment. In an interview, you'll probably be asked what qualities you possess that set you apart from other applicants and how you see yourself as an asset to the organization. In preparing to answer these questions, consider your education, communication and critical-thinking skills, and ability to be self-directed and handle challenges. In-

Benefits of Magnet® Recognition

Hospitals that have achieved Magnet Recognition offer many benefits that may help nurses meet their professional goals.

- These organizations tend to have lower patient-to-nurse ratios, resulting in increased job satisfaction, and some may have a higher pay scale and funds designated for reinvestment in professional staff.
- These organizations typically provide nurses with more educational opportunities, direct involvement in strategic planning, engagement to identify patient and staff concerns, and evidence-based solutions to create safe work environments.
- Hospitals with Magnet Recognition are likely to have fewer safety-related injuries or incidents involving staff and patients, which means fewer back or lift-related injuries, accidental needlesticks, body-fluid exposures, patient falls, and patient-tissue injuries.

The bottom line is that organizations with Magnet Recognition offer opportunities for job satisfaction, career advancement, and professional growth, along with good patient outcomes and a safe work environment.

clude an example of each quality in action. Also think about where you see yourself professionally in 5 years and 10 years. Will your potential employer provide the assistance and support to help you achieve those goals?

Diagnosing

Review your potential employer's mission and vision statements. How do they define patient care goals, community goals, and staff and healthcare provider involvement? Does the organizational chart support open communication, nursing education and advancement, improved patient outcomes, and healthy communities? Is the chief executive officer a nurse? How is the organization viewed by the community it serves and by the RNs and staff they employ?

Planning

Based on your diagnosis, weigh the benefits of all your potential employers and how they measure up. List the benefits each organization provides, including salary, health insurance, tuition support, paid vacation, and personal time. You'll also want to note the nurse turnover rate, how much voice employees have in the day-to-day and long-range projections of patient care, community interaction with the organization, overall work environment, and opportunities for professional growth and career advancement.

After you've completed the list, rate each potential employer based on your personal priorities. A side-by-side comparison of possible posi-

tions will show you how each provides what you're seeking. For example, if you want summers and school holidays off because of family commitments, a school nurse position may meet your goals. And although a hospital with Magnet Recognition is ideal, you must weigh that along with other factors. Is location important to you? Then maybe the local hospital is the right choice, even if it doesn't have Magnet Recognition.

Implementing

Begin implementing your plan by updating your résumé and submitting applications to the organizations you've selected as being the best professional and personal fits. Follow up on your applications and meet with nurse recruiters. After all interviews and meetings, write a thank-you note that acknowledges the time of those you met with and includes a sentence or two about how you align with their mission and values and that you're certain you'd be a valued member of their healthcare team and an asset to the organization.

Evaluating

Just as education is a life-long process, so is evaluating your professional and career plan. RNs are always learning, which may lead to different professional venues. So, keep evaluating. Will the organization provide you with the education, knowledge, and skills you'll need to reach your future goals?

An ongoing process

Taking the nursing process approach to your job search will help you prioritize your needs and goals and determine the right job and organization fit for you. And remember, professional growth requires ongoing assessment and evaluation to ensure that your career doesn't stagnate and that you continue to achieve new goals you set for yourself. ★

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