

The perils of greener pastures



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“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” -
Mahatma Gandhi

Nothing is permanent but change, as goes a famous saying. Seeking a change in the status quo is a powerful evolutionary drive, influencing the magnificent migrations we see in nature, and which sometimes lead to powerful moments in history, altering millions of lives for several decades.

As individuals, we are driven by our instincts to improve our present circumstance, a form of hunger that we term as ambition.

At the workplace, we see ambitions clash, support, blend and unify as various individuals learn to work together as a team. Rewards, recognitions, encouragement, and promotions go a long way in satisfying individual ambition. And yet, there comes a point in every employee’s career where they feel they’re at a cross-road, pondering whether they need to stay on course, or perhaps take an alluring turn onto an unknown path, ripe with the promise of career progression.

But then again, the fear of unknown also prevents them from moving in a new direction. “What if?” becomes a powerful roadblock, especially when personal situations and realities get added to the mix.

So, when is it the right time to switch careers?

A career change driven by whimsical factors leads to disaster. The underlying reasons for seeking a job change should be holistic and backed by conviction that the job change is essential for career growth.

We must also note that there are sometimes circumstances when employees have been provided with all parameters of work satisfaction, and yet they seek change.

Sometimes, this is driven by the promise of a significant salary increase. While this is a powerful influencer, I strongly suggest that professionals shouldn’t just concentrate on their pay packages, but also look at the sustainability of the organization and the role and the ecosystem therein

Transitioning to a new job requires investment of time and effort to build new working relationships, getting to know a new set of people, and to familiarize with the new work culture. In certain professions, which demand high concentration and are target driven, such as marketing and BD, the ability to deliver remains pivotal for the role. You need to know what you are in for

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and what KPIs have been set so you deliver objectively and not subjectively.

It is equally important to look at your long-term career goals and remind yourself of what the larger picture is. Is your professional change too early or too late? If success comes too early, you may not be prepared for it and there are higher chances of eventual failure which puts you 10 steps back. If success comes too late, you end up spending a whole lot of time trying to “catch up” with your peers.

The key is to find the right timing for a change in your career and your assessment of your future road map. You need to evaluate your personal and professional goals and break them down into short term, medium and long term goals and then work on a plan to achieve them. You must also consider the fact that changing jobs with existing financial obligations leads to huge burden and strain on personal finance as well.

Your career change also needs to be in line with your personal life targets. There is an important balance that we must strike between our personal vs professional commitments. The support of a strong family for the development of your career and vice versa is very important to get you where you are. No one wants to bear the guilt of hearing the phrase “You were never there for any of my school functions” or “I never had my husband/ wife’s support” when you reach home.

It is imperative to see that the change you seek is aligned with your personal and financial health. Any move should be carefully evaluated and should match the expectations on the job.

Finally, career changes must also be looked at in terms of how they reflect your career stabil-

ity. Employees often forget that besides IQ and skills, companies also search for people with a track record of dependability and loyalty. An employee who has a track record of two 5 year stints with major companies, with a sustained career progression and consistent performance, is more attractive to an employer than an employee who has held 10 jobs in 10 years, no matter how much progress the latter’s track record indicates.

In the end, it is perfectly natural to seek greener pastures over the horizon. However, a bit of restraint, patience and wisdom can go a long way in making the switch rewarding.

Let me end with an example of a well-timed career change.

Steve Ballmer started his careers as an assistant product manager at Procter & Gamble for two years, where he shared an office with Jeffrey R. Immelt, who later became CEO of General Electric. In 1980, he dropped out of the Stanford Graduate School of Business to join a 5-year-old software company as its 30th employee and Business manager.

He was offered an initial salary of \$50,000 along with a percentage of ownership of the company. He then helped the company secure a historic deal with IBM to develop software for their new PCs.

That company was Microsoft and Steve Ballmer led several divisions till he eventually succeeded Bill Gates as Microsoft’s CEO.

In the end, his astute move, against conventional wisdom, opened new Windows of opportunity for historic success. ■

(The blog is written by Tariq Chauhan, Group Chief Executive Officer, EFS Facilities Services. Find the online version on www.fm-today.com)