

Should You Quit Your Job?

by Holly Bauer Forsyth

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Summary. There are plenty of good reasons to quit a job. Maybe you want better pay, need to get away from a toxic boss, or are ready to pursue a different career. But quitting can be scary, because it also highlights what you stand to lose: the relationships you've cultivated... [more](#)

There are plenty of good reasons to quit a job. Maybe you want better pay, need to get away from a toxic boss, or are ready to pursue a different career. A few years ago I left what had once felt like a dream role because I was burned out past the point of no return.

Quitting can be scary, though, because it highlights what you stand to lose: the relationships you've cultivated with colleagues, the comfort of a familiar boss and organization, financial stability, sometimes even your sense of yourself as a gritty, resilient, loyal person. Several new books offer advice for weighing the benefits and the costs of quitting—urging us to ask, What will I gain? instead of What will I lose?

In *Quit* the consultant and former poker champion Annie Duke reminds us that good decision-making always involves considering the costs of not taking action. Staying on an unfruitful path—no matter how much time and energy you've already invested going down it—won't lead to real progress. “Contrary to popular belief,” she writes, “quitting will get you to where you want to go faster.”

How can you know for sure whether you're making the right call? You can't, but you can make an educated guess. Like poker, “stick or quit” is a game of probability, and Duke recommends looking at the seemingly qualitative decision from a quantitative perspective by estimating the expected value of each course of action. First come up with a system for scoring the possible outcomes, good and bad, of staying in your current job and of taking a new one. (When I tested this out with a hypothetical scenario, I used a simple 1-to-10 scale.) Then estimate each outcome's probability of happening. Multiply the probability by the outcome score to get the expected value of each outcome and add them all up. If that sounds a little too quantitative, just ask yourself, What are the chances I'll be happy in my current job six months from now? What are the chances I'll be happy in a new one? Many people answer the first question with an unequivocal

“zero percent” and reply “I don’t know” to the second—which means there’s a chance it will be higher than zero, making the choice feel easier.

Before I left that dream job, I made a similar calculation. I was nervous about jumping ship without having anything else lined up, but I knew that my odds of being happier doing something different were almost certain. So I quit, and my estimate was right—I found a more creatively fulfilling job, and my mental health improved.

The online marketing educator Amy Porterfield quit her corporate job to gain entrepreneurial freedom, and in *Two Weeks Notice* she explains her story. After years of working to help achieve someone else’s vision, she discovered what she describes as her answer to Why quit? “I do not want another person to tell me what to do, when to do it, or how to do it—ever again.”

If you, too, want to quit and set out on your own, Porterfield’s comprehensive handbook for creating your own business can help. She offers plenty of concrete guidance for the practical parts of running the show, like determining your ideal customer, building your email list, and that small matter of generating revenue. She starts at the very beginning, walking you through how to arrive at your own “why” and—should that point to leaving your job—how to give your notice.

The former social impact research agency CEO Alisha Fernandez Miranda took a different approach after she stepped down from her company. In *My What If Year* she recounts how she decided to take a break from her successful, established career to pursue a series of internships. Although she already had the entrepreneurial freedom that Porterfield desired, she was feeling the need for more adventure. As she puts it, “I had fallen into a life that was not what I wanted, and I couldn’t see any way to escape from it without tossing a live grenade into the carefully constructed world I had built.”

With the encouragement of her friends and the support of her family, Miranda spent 12-plus months working for two Broadway productions, a fitness start-up, Christie's auction house, and a luxury hotel in Scotland. Throughout her book you can see a version of Duke's expected-value calculation in action. Yes, there were downsides: Her business was at risk of losing momentum, she was forfeiting her income for the year, and her family's routine would be thrown off. But she realized that the status quo also came with substantial costs—and that she stood to gain much more by shaking things up. “Maybe I didn't need to be defined by my achievements and how fast I could get there, but instead by what brought me joy and happiness and inspired my passions,” she writes.

Not all of us are in a position to pause our careers for unpaid work, but some low-stakes exploration of other paths—volunteering, pursuing a new hobby, taking a class—can give us perspective on whether a job or career change might be worthwhile.

The upheaval of the pandemic and other events of the past few years have prompted many of us to reconsider what's important in work—and in the other parts of our lives. Although there's some debate about whether the Great Resignation was real or merely a reshuffling of workers, the millions of people who did walk away from their jobs helped dispel some of the stigma around quitting. It should no longer be framed as indicative of failure or an inability to cut it. Instead, let's call it calculated risk-taking—even bravery. As we continue to evaluate our priorities in the face of uncertainty—including a murky global economic outlook—we shouldn't forget that we often gain more by quitting than by sticking it out.

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