

# Networking Works!



## Parting Company on Friendly Terms

When an employee leaves your firm, the natural tendency is to wish him or her well and move on. This DPRCG member suggests it's good business to put a bit more effort into your fond farewells and build amicable post-employment relationships.

Employee turnover is inevitable. We've seen just about everything: mass exoduses, surprise retirements, and now, relentless job shopping by some Millennials.

Through it all, we've kept to an overriding philosophy: Part ways with exiting employees as amicably and respectfully as possible. It's not only the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do.

It's amazing where an ex-employee might show up in the future. She may be the next head of the department of public works. He may be the managing partner with a firm to whom you are serving as a subconsultant. What's more, you may need to call upon them for assistance in the event of a future project dispute or claim.

We had a department head leave on marginally amicable terms. But we endeavored to salvage a workable relationship and eventually had to call on his assistance during a claim. We paid him for his time and he did a good job representing our firm and minimizing damages. It also helped that his name was associated with the project, so his reputation and ego were involved.

### Explore All the Options

Begin the debriefing process as soon as you learn a valued employee is leaving. We start by finding out why they want to leave. Sometimes there may be a misunderstanding regarding their standing with the firm or future opportunities. If so, work to rectify the situation and see if there might be a way to hammer out a resolution that would allow the employee to stay.

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For valued employees moving into retirement, you might want to investigate alternate options, letting them know that full-time employment and retirement are not the only paths forward. Perhaps the retiring employee would want a part-time role as a senior advisor, or an emeritus position to mentor junior designers. Maybe the individual just wants to design again as an independent contractor, gladly giving up their managerial role and working on a per-project basis. Even if they turn down these options, they'll appreciate the gratitude and respect you've shown.

If the employee has a solid reason for leaving, don't twist their arm to stay. Honor and respect their decision. Trying to get them to change their mind by altering their job or offering more money rarely works out in the end.

## Retaining Institutional Knowledge

When a valued employee retires or makes a career move to leave, you want to retain the very valuable institutional knowledge they have regarding your firm's projects.

Try to set an exit date that allows ample time for you to gather as much of their institutional knowledge as possible. Team the departing employee with the successor who will take over their work so project information can be readily transferred. Schedule project debriefings and request status reports on a regular basis.

We also have our human resource department conduct exit interviews with all of our departing employees. We take these interviews seriously and find them helpful, but also realize they are just a single data point to learn from.

## Don't Completely Shut the Door

Don't completely shut the door on your relationship when a valued employee leaves. Check in with the person after six months or so to ask how things are going. Reaching out to highly valued ex-employees may even result in unexpected benefits.

Case in point: A long-term employee left our firm to pursue what he considered a dream opportunity in a completely different line of business. We fully supported his decision, wished him well and we remained friends. A few years later, we discovered that the dream opportunity had become a nightmare, and that this person would likely jump at the opportunity to return to our firm. We called him, he accepted our job offer and today he's running an important specialty group for us.

## Building Relationships with Millennials

We're realizing that creating and building relationships with Millennials requires a whole different tack than that used for Boomers and others. Millennials often do not perceive long-term employment with the same firm as a desirable career path instead working a year or two with each employer to gain a variety of experiences and perhaps that perfect job. We recently experienced a 50% turnover rate with our Millennials over a three-year period, largely because of this phenomenon.

The issue here is that it's difficult to build a positive relationship when you only have a year or two together. To tackle this problem we developed a rotational program for our new hires that better matches their career goals.

New hires are slotted into their first position for a three-month term. They are then encouraged to move into one of our other operating disciplines for three months. This rotation occurs every three months for the first year. Employees have an opportunity to try out four different but ancillary areas. At the end of the first year, they choose their permanent position.

So far, the program has been a great recruitment tool and seems to help us retain Millennials longer. Millennials are more apt to find their niche and stay with the firm longer. And when they do leave, they are appreciative for the multiple opportunities and parting company is on friendly terms.

**Developed by DPRCG members working in collaboration with AXA XL's Design Professional team. Please send your feedback to: [dprcg@axaxl.com](mailto:dprcg@axaxl.com)**

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