

CAREER COLUMNIST

Searching for Greener Pastures

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Do you like your job, but you're thinking of leaving it for higher compensation elsewhere? Maybe it's not money, but it is a new challenge or more advancement potential you're seeking.

Whatever has you considering a job change, this might be the right time to make your move. The unemployment rate has dropped to 5.2% nationwide and job creation is continuing at a decent clip.

Before discarding your current job, however, retention consultant Beverly Kaye recommends making sure you can't get what you're looking for from your current employer.

"Ask and you may receive," said Kaye, founder and president of Career Systems International in Sherman Oaks and co-author of "Love It, Don't Leave It: 26 Ways to Get What You Want at Work" and "Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay."

"Too often, employees expect managers to read their minds. They often don't tell their managers what's wrong or what they really want. Or if they do ask, it's often done in a confrontational way rather than with a tone of collaboration. There's often a demand implicit in the request instead of creative suggestions about how they can be of greater value to the organization.

"Remember, too," Kaye said, "timing can be everything. For example, if you asked for a raise a year ago and the answer was 'no' then, you might want to consider asking again. First ask yourself what might be different now versus a year ago. Has the company's business improved? Perhaps you completed a project in the last few months that cut costs or boosted the company's bottom line in some way and made you a more valued employee. Maybe you've simply done more homework and are better prepared this time to discuss 'comparables' being paid by other companies for people with your skills and experience."

The point is a "no" response a year ago doesn't mean you won't get a "yes" response from your employer if you make the same or a similar request now, Kaye said.

Keep in mind, too, with many employees expected to leave companies voluntarily as the job market improves, employers are becoming more focused on retaining valued staff members. The U.S. Job Recovery and Retention Survey released in late 2004 by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) found that

25% of the human resource (HR) professionals polled have plans to implement retention programs.

Even if your next request for a promotion or raise does not meet with success, Kaye said to consider all the equity you have in your current job before deciding to leave it.

"Most people think only of the 'financial' equity they have in a job," she said. "I encourage employees to consider other types of equity they've built as well. Consider, for example, the skill equity you have in your current job. You've learned how to develop and apply your skills in that milieu. In a new job, there will invariably be a learning curve before you're completely up to speed."

Kaye also mentioned "influence equity" as being worthy of consideration.

"In your current organization, you already know who the key players are. You may even be one of them," she said.

Not to be overlooked either, is what Kaye calls "social equity."

"You likely have friends at work, people you hang out with at lunch or after work," she said. "We find that one of the key retention drivers for people is the friends they have at work."

Kaye recognizes people may still decide to change employers after attempts to achieve their goals with their current employers fail. For those who make that decision, she offered this advice.

"Be sure to ask questions and thoroughly evaluate any organization you're considering before leaving your current job," she said. "Try to meet not only with the potential future boss, but with future co-workers. Use your networking contacts to learn more about the organization. Too often, people leave for greener pastures only to find Astroturf! After the honeymoon period is over, they often encounter the same frustrations and disappointments. "Be really clear about the kind of work you want to do and the kind of people you want to work with," Kaye said. "Make sure you know what matters most to you whether it's money or challenging work. The more clearly you know and state your wants and needs, the better a move you're likely to make."