

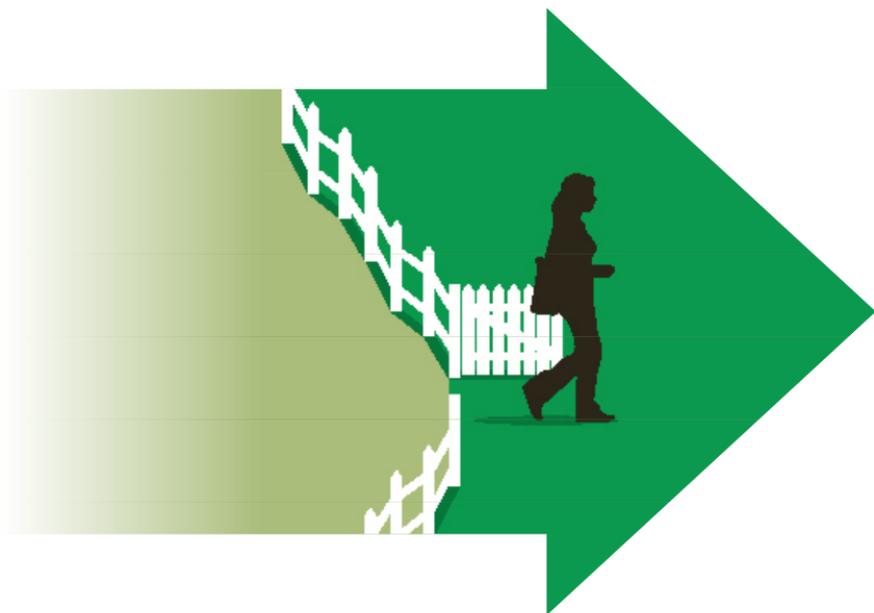


ART of LIVING

Why opting out can do you good

Quit While You're Ahead

BY LISA COXON



ISTOCKPHOTO

 LATE LAST YEAR, I decided to leave my job, a choice that was equally daunting and exhilarating. Quitting is like deciding to rearrange a room: you've grown comfortable with the status quo, and it can be hard to picture the end result or even see why change is necessary. And yet, there's the nagging feeling that you're no longer entirely satisfied with your current circumstances.

While it's not out of the question for feelings of regret to surface after a major overhaul, leaving a position, project or situation can reveal exciting possibilities, making you feel inspired and renewed.

Decide to Change Your Perspective

Because quitting can trigger feelings of guilt and shame, we often do everything possible to avoid it.

"We're taught from our earliest days that if you quit something, it means you're a failure," says Will Meek, a counselling psychologist in Vancouver, Wash. Meek suggests viewing quitting in a virtuous light instead—as a behaviour that involves considerable courage, foresight and trust. "Rather than shaming, I think we could teach the value of knowing when to stop."

The right time, he says, often comes after you've put a lot of effort into something but have seen no improvement. A couple attempting

to salvage a flagging relationship, for example, might have tried therapy or implementing regular date nights, to no avail. At that point, Meek says, you can reassure yourself that it makes good sense to go in different directions.

Once you decide it's time to opt out, remember: you're in charge of how to deliver that message. Friends and family members may respond to news of a change with concerns. Meek suggests offering context and next steps. "Being able to say, 'I've decided to leave my job, and here's what I'm going to do about it' can alter how other people receive your message," he says. Not only that, but sharing future plans can bolster your own sense of resolve.

Improve Your Quality of Life

Quitting often happens in situations where we're unhappy, fearful or have determined we have no other choice, factors that can have adverse effects on our health. Perhaps you find your work unfulfilling, or you've jumped into a new relationship before you're ready—and, as a result, you're operating under intense pressure.

"If stress is chronic and not managed well, it can start to take a physical toll," says Meek. According to the American Psychological Association, that tension can trigger or exacerbate

heart attacks and arrhythmias and increase the risk of disease, so walking away from whatever is causing it can have significant physical health benefits. “We often see a reduction in the stress hormone cortisol, which can lower blood pressure and may even decrease the heart rate,” says Dr. Alex Lickerman, a primary care physician in Chicago.

Cutting ties can also have a dramatic effect on your mood. According to a 2011 study in the journal *Human Relations*, staying at a job you hate out of obligation or a perceived lack of options can leave you emotionally drained. While it’s not uncommon to experience momentary grief after a major life change, Mark Franklin, the president of Toronto-based CareerCycles, has observed positive effects in the long term. “When I see people start to do things they love, there’s a lot of relief,” he says.

Take Your Passion, Make It Happen

Abandoning situations that fail to bring you joy can leave you with ample time to explore where your heart is truly leading you. In a study that was published in 1999,

then Harvard University professor Herminia Ibarra looked at how bankers transitioned into different roles that required new skill sets—someone who spent a lot of time dealing with computers, for instance, was asked to take on personal interactions. Subjects were especially drawn to acting out a version of their future selves through “imitation strategies”—a tactic they likened to “trying on different clothes.”



Abandoning situations that don't bring you joy can leave you with time to explore where your heart is leading you.

Franklin suggests a similar approach as a way to suss out what your true desires might be in your post-quitting life and envision your future self. “Pretend to be a certain kind of person, or go and meet others who are doing what you want to do,” he says. “Try it on, see how it feels and decide if it’s a good fit for you.”

It may not feel like it at the time, but just moving on from a situation that’s not quite right can help you get back on track. That was definitely true in my case. In December 2015, I left my client-relations job and started working somewhere less than ideal. Not long after that, I was assigned this story, about the upside of quitting, on the same day a dream editorial position fell in my lap. Life’s funny like that. **R**