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Should You Stay Or Should You Go? A Reality Check Before Making the Leap

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Many people spend their time off during the holidays reflecting on big questions, including whether it's time to look for a job in the new year. The unknown can often seem more attractive than your current job, but [Greg Sedgwick](#), one of our mentors at [Merryck & Co.](#) — we're a senior leadership development and executive mentoring firm — shares some wise points to consider before giving up on your current job.

Q. What have been some common themes and patterns that come up when you're advising senior executives?

A. One consistent theme is that people want to figure out their next career move. They want to understand what their options are, and they want to understand what they should and shouldn't do to capitalize on those options. And sometimes people just want a bit of encouragement about what to do next in their career.

People are generally realistic, and more often than not they are conservative in their aspirations, and not fully recognizing the extent of their opportunities and how far they can go.

Q. What have been some common themes and patterns that come up when you're advising senior executives?

A. If they say that they're thinking about doing something different, I'll ask why, and then remind them that the grass is not always greener somewhere else. I often caution people just to take a deep breath and look around at what they're doing now because invariably change can be quite difficult.

Then I tell them to look at all the options available to them, both within their type of role and the industry they're in, and to start networking and opening themselves up to possibilities that they might not be seeing, because they often are just thinking about doing the same job somewhere else or with a bigger title.

Q. The question of "should I stay or should I go?" is a thorny one for a lot of people.

A. It often starts because someone has a new manager or a new chief executive, and there's a sense that they're moving the company in the wrong direction. I often say, "You've got two options. You can stay or you can go. And if you stay, this change may pass. This person may move somewhere else, and so you've got at least that. If you go, you'll be moving into something you don't know and that could be as unsettling, as well."



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in nine months' time."*

So I urge people to understand that often in corporations, nothing's forever. And often it's just better to keep your head down, bite the bullet and see if you're still dissatisfied in nine months' time before you make a decision to give up, say, 15 years of service. Sometimes they focus on a short-term inflection point, rather than a significant shift, and it takes on outsized importance in their thinking about their career.

Q. But a lot of people say that it's good to move around. You get exposed to different companies, you expand your network and change is good. What would you say to them?

A. I spent 22 years with one company. I had a wonderful experience, traveled the world, and saw interesting businesses. At regular points of my tenure, I felt ready to leave. But then something changed -- there was a reorganization or something -- so I learned that perhaps it's best just to bide your time. And organizations are changing rapidly, so new opportunities are always opening up.

Q. Let's talk about corporate cultures. What are the most common momentum killers that you've seen?

A. Often in big companies, incentive programs become difficult, mechanistic, and hard to understand. People learn that the way they get rewarded is by playing corporate politics and games rather than delivering. Things become so complex, with both financial and non-financial objectives, that people are beholden to too many agendas and different forces within the organization. Those incentive plans become so complex that people disengage.

Q. What did you find the most challenging part of being a CEO?

A. It's a very lonely job. It's as if you walk around every day with a share price on your forehead, and everybody's measuring your performance by the share price. It's also very difficult managing a board. Before you become a CEO, you have one boss. But then suddenly you have six or seven directors or more, and each of them has their view on what you should be doing. Those were the most challenging. The actual management of the company wasn't that difficult.

Q. If you were a chairman choosing among two CEO candidates and their backgrounds were very similar, what is the X-factor that will make you choose one over the other?

A. Integrity is a big swing factor for me -- integrity in terms of their openness, integrity in terms of transparency of numbers, integrity in terms of dealing with people. It's about being trustworthy. As part of the vetting process, I'd be looking for any incidents in the past where there were signs that they weren't operating with complete integrity with people and business performance.

Q. What were some key leadership lessons for you personally?

A. I moved up fairly quickly at a young age. I was 30 when I was running quite a large profit center in a manufacturing company. The CEO of the company and I, for some reason, just

clicked. He was maybe two or three levels up, but he ensured my safe passage through the company and provided me opportunities in different business units.

But then things changed, and I ended up with a new boss. This guy was completely different, and there was a complete shake-up of the organization. Many people didn't adapt, but I adapted and chose to work for him, and I learned a completely different set of skills and approaches to management.

Q. If you could only ask somebody one question and you had to decide based on their answer whether to hire them, what would that question be?

A. "Tell me about your management team." That question gives me so many other perspectives of that person -- the way they talk about people, the way they define success, what they value in people. If I had just one question, that would be the best one.

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