



Quitting a job with class important, experts say

by: LAURIE WINSLOW World Staff Writer
Sunday, August 22, 2010
8/22/2010 7:23:38 AM

Leaving a job with class never backfires.

That apparently was a lesson lost on Steven Slater - the notorious JetBlue flight attendant who caused a media storm when he quit his job.

By now, most everyone has heard about Slater, who flew off the handle following an alleged confrontation with a passenger and quit his job with an obscenity-laced rant over the plane's public address system before escaping down the plane's emergency chute.

His dramatic exit has resonated with many people who know what it's like to work with rude customers or stressful job demands. But what he did was wrong, workplace experts say.

"Whether it's a job you love or a job you've hated, the important thing is that you resign with class. You never want to leave on bad terms, if possible. The main thing is you don't burn bridges," said Rachel Wagner, founder and director of Tulsa-based Rachel Wagner Etiquette and Protocol.

Tempers are short, and many workers feel pressured with slimmer staffs and longer work hours.

"Employees are frustrated with the economy, and in a bad economy some employers take advantage. They know that they can get a way with a lot more and employees really don't have anywhere to go," said Kevin Kennemer, founder of The People Group in Tulsa. "So you're sensing some frustration from employees because they are kind of in this scenario where they can't leave to go get another job."

The airline industry in particular can be very frustrating for passengers, let alone employees, who often must fend for themselves. But an employee shouldn't be able to pull a stunt like this flight attendant did and receive all this attention, Kennemer said.

"Some people are calling him a hero; he is not a hero. Sure, flight attendants can be heroes, and we have seen heroes ... but what he did was not heroic. He quit. He allowed the situation to get out of hand, and he became unprofessional," he said.

The people who deserve accolades are the ones who go into work every day with smiles on their faces and try to handle people with class and dignity even when they're not being treated that way, said Lynn Flinn, president and managing partner of The Rowland Group. They work hard every day and do the best they can.

Becoming emotionally involved in a situation doesn't help matters. Employees who find themselves in a heated situation at work like Slater did should remove themselves and let someone else handle it, Kennemer said.

Preferably, employees should be able to talk to their supervisor, explain their frustrations and work out a solution before it gets out of hand. That might entail changing responsibilities or switching positions at work. "Obviously, communication is so important," Kennemer added.

Trash-talking an employer can have the opposite effect and reflect poorly on the person saying such things.

"You don't want to bad-mouth your boss or your company even if you have worked for the worst boss in the world," Wagner said. "The world is pretty small, especially when it comes to social media. You never know the information that gets passed around from Facebook or Twitter ... All of those things have a way of coming back to bite you. Your paths may cross with this person again. One of these former employees could end up being your boss or wind up in a cubicle next to you."

Flinn has met several job candidates who start their job search with negative comments about their previous employers. It's generally not a good sign if the pattern repeats itself and might indicate that something is wrong with the behavior of the person seeking the job, rather than the former employer, she said.

If you talk negatively about a former employer, those interviewing you for a job may wonder what you'll say about them when you leave one day, Flinn added.

"When you're talking about a town like Tulsa, that is smaller, the word gets around more than you think it will," Flinn said. "People can connect dots here."

Talk goes on behind the scenes. Word spreads. A future boss may be a friend of your last boss or know someone who worked with you.

People often have a false sense of security when they leave a job and assume no one will learn what happened there, but chances are "very high" they will, Flinn said.

"Leaving a job with class and courtesy will never come back to haunt you," Wagner said.

Dos and don'ts for leaving a job

Have you ever been so furious, so fed up with your job that you've wanted to stomp out of the office, hurl a BlackBerry across the room, spew venom at anyone in earshot or throw a pie in your supervisor's face?

Last impressions make lasting impressions. So think before you act.

Here are some job resigning dos and don'ts.

Don't steal company information or data. Don't send files to a competitor. "Don't do things that are vindictive. You could actually get in a lot of trouble over that with some of the privacy rules that companies have set up," said Kevin Kennemer, founder of The People Group in Tulsa.

He noted that many employers require that employees sign confidentiality agreements when they start a job. He recalled the termination of one employee who when escorted back to her work space hit one computer key and deleted every file.

Don't let the heat of the moment drive your decision-making process.

In the heat of the moment, you might think a boss is your enemy, but time has a way of healing disagreements. Later on you may realize your boss was just doing his or her job.

No matter what your difference of opinion with an employer, extend a hand of friendship when leaving a job. You never know when you might need that individual later in your career, Kennemer said.

Do give proper notice. No matter how stressed you are, don't just walk off the job, say human resource experts. Give your employer enough notice to make the transition. Some companies might require a two-week notice, others a four-week notice.

Do stay engaged in your work up until you leave. Many people after they give their notice suffer from "short-timers syndrome" and slack off.

Try to stay 100 percent engaged, said Rachel Wagner, founder and director of Tulsa-based Rachel Wagner Etiquette and Protocol. Even if you have a great track record, people remember those final days, which can become your legacy.

Go the extra mile and offer to train your replacement during this overlap time. Invite him or her to call you with questions even after you've left your job, Wagner said.

Lynn Flinn, president and managing partner of The Rowland Group, appreciates people who go above and beyond their normal duties during their last two weeks of work.

"I truly do remember employees that have worked up to the last minute and have asked, 'What else do you need me to do? How can I help you?' Those people stand out. You will always have a soft spot for them. You will always do something extra for them because they did something extra for you," Flinn said.

Do leave your desk and office clean. Take time to organize materials for the person replacing you.

Don't quit by e-mail. Quitting by e-mail is the chicken way out, Flinn said. Just as an employee doesn't want to be fired by e-mail or voice mail, an employer doesn't want to learn of a resignation that way, either.

Do provide a written letter of resignation. You may not feel like writing a letter because you're angry or upset, but do it as a courtesy to your employer. The letter can be brief and simple, stating that you're leaving your job to pursue other opportunities. You don't have to give specifics on where you're going and what you'll be doing, Wagner said.

"No matter how you feel, thank your boss for the opportunity of working for the company and the skills you've learned. It's just a formal way of stating you're leaving and directing your appreciation to them," Wagner added.

Present the letter after you've met with your supervisor or boss in person and have told them you're resigning. Don't leave the letter on his or her chair or desk, Flinn said.

After notifying your boss, you also may want to send a brief, positive e-mail to your co-workers, Wagner said. Provide them with your new contact information because you may want to network with them or get reference letters in the future.

Don't bad-mouth your boss. The world is small, especially with today's social media and communication tools such as Twitter and Facebook. Information spreads quickly, and words said in haste can come back to haunt you.

Don't use exit interviews as a way to trash your boss or throw personal potshots, Wagner said. Instead, use them for constructive feedback. For example, you could explain how there was lack of communication within your department or how you weren't given enough job responsibilities.

"Keep that positive. Don't air dirty laundry," Wagner added.

Do leave with class and dignity. The one thing you have is your reputation. How you handle yourself in the most difficult circumstances will reveal your true character, Flinn said.

"There is never a downside to leaving your last employer with a good feeling about you. There is never a downside to leaving with class," Flinn said.

Rachel Wagner is a certified corporate etiquette and international protocol consultant and founder of the business etiquette firm, Rachel Wagner Etiquette and Protocol. She trains leadership teams on the topics of business and dining etiquette to polish their professional presence and the image of their company. Rachel is active with the American Society for Training and Development and the National Speaker's Association. She is author of a popular e-zine, The Savvy Professional, and is frequently quoted in the media. She can be reached by phone at 918.970.4400 or by email at Rachel@EtiquetteTrainer.com. Website: www.EtiquetteTrainer.com.

[HOME](#) | [ETIQUETTE SERVICES](#) | [ABOUT RACHEL](#) | [ARTICLES & NEWS](#) | [CONTACT](#)