

A FORK IN THE ROAD

Is it time to move on or ask for a raise? It's not as risky as you might think.

BY LINDSAY SCOTT

Q: *I've been a project manager for a number of years at the same organization. My goal is to be promoted, but I found out we're going to be part of a merger. It now looks unlikely I'll be considered for a senior post, and current market conditions make me feel that moving on is too risky. Should I just sit tight?*

A: For most people, moving jobs always has and always will have an element of risk. You need to ask yourself: Should you stick where you are, drawing a salary and performing a job you know you can do? Or is it better to get out of your comfort zone and find the next challenge—albeit potentially with a short period of anxiety while you find your footing?

Many people consider seeking a new job to be a risk without taking the time to analyze what it truly means. Think about the risk management you carry out as a project manager: the process you go through to identify, analyze and prioritize risks, how you determine which are threats or opportunities, and how you control them. That process turns both identifiable and unidentifiable “risk” into something known and managed. Why not apply these same principles as you prepare to move into a new position?

Here are some common concerns about changing jobs:

- Can I find a position that pays the same or more than I currently earn?
- How do I know if a role will really allow me to advance in my career?
- How do I check out a potential employer to see if I would fit into its culture?
- What will be the reaction when I hand in my resignation?
- What do I do if the move doesn't work out?

Once you have worked through your risk-management process—including communicating with family members (your stakeholders!)—you may find that risk isn't really an issue at all. It may turn out that what you're left with is an exciting new opportunity, along with a plan of action for landing your new position.

Q: *My performance review is coming up. I think I've done an excellent job over the last year and I want to ask for a raise. How can I give it my best shot?*

A: As a project management practitioner you have an unfair advantage over colleagues outside the field. Many of the skills required for this potentially difficult task are ones any good project manager should possess:

Situational Analysis: Make sure the timing is right. If your organization has been experiencing difficulties in recent years, will your manager turn down your request based on that fact alone? Even if your company is booming, what has your real contribution been over the past 12 months compared to your peers? Have you stood out? Whatever the situation, you need to make sure you complete this stage in a truthful way that can stand up to a rigorous challenge.

Planning: Do you have a clear idea about how your managers like to be approached, how they make decisions, and what information and presentation style they prefer?

Also, know what *you* want in advance. How much of a pay raise are you looking for, and how did you arrive at that number? Would you consider other alternatives, such as bonuses? If appropriate, back up your request with comparable salary figures from the wider marketplace. Go in armed with achievements that demonstrate your abilities and be ready to articulate exactly why you believe that you've done an “excellent job.” Remember to include facts and figures, such as revenues, profit and benefits realized.

Presentation: Make sure you prepare for the meeting by reviewing your plan from several viewpoints. Be ready for objections and have additional materials available to support your ideas.

Negotiation: Put yourself in your manager's shoes and ask yourself these questions:

1. Why should I give this person a raise?
2. What benefits would the company receive?
3. What changes—such as increased performance—can I expect?

Consider all the objections your manager might bring to the table and prepare your responses.

Closure: If all goes well, agree on a timeline to enact your new compensation. If you don't achieve the desired result, though, avoid becoming too emotional or making any rash moves that you might regret later. Instead, seek the reasons for the decision and start planning how you can work toward getting the result you're after next time. *PM*

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