

Is there a right way to quit your job? Research finds some ways are better than others

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Most everybody has been there: you've decided to quit your job and now you have to inform your employer that you're leaving. So what is the best way to resign?

Turns out, there are generally seven ways in which people quit their jobs, and there are two key factors that determine whether a person resigns in a positive way or in a way that could have damaging consequences for the business, new research from Oregon State University shows.

Those predictors are whether an [employee](#) feels they are being treated fairly at work, and whether they feel they are respected by their boss, said Anthony Klotz, an assistant professor in the College of Business at OSU and lead author of the paper. Those who feel they are respected and treated fairly are more likely to resign in a positive manner.

"As an employee, you are pretty powerless for much of your work life, until you decide to quit," he said. "That is the one time you feel empowered

and have a chance to even the score if you feel like you've been treated badly."

Employee resignations are part of doing business; in the U.S. and western Europe, resignation rates run about 10 percent per year, while in parts of Asia, they can be much higher. But there is little known about how employees go about quitting their jobs, and what the implications of their resignations may have for the company, good or bad.

"There is a lot of research about why people quit their jobs. But very little is known about how people quit," Klotz said. "Employers as well as employees want to know what the right way is."

Klotz and his co-author, Mark Bolino of the University of Oklahoma, set out to learn more about how employees quit their jobs and the consequences of their choices when doing so. Their findings were published recently in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*. The study was supported by the Society for Human Resource Management Foundation.

Through a series of studies, including interviews with employees and employers, the researchers found that generally, employees quit in one of seven ways:

- **By the book:** These resignations involve a face-to-face meeting with one's manager to announce the resignation, a standard notice period, and an explanation of the reason for quitting.
- **Perfunctory:** These resignations are similar to "by the book" resignations, except the meeting tends to be shorter and the reason for quitting is not provided.
- **Grateful goodbye:** Employees express gratitude toward their employer and often

offer to help with the transition period.

- In the loop: In these resignations, employees typically confide in their manager that they are contemplating quitting, or are looking for another job, before formally resigning.
- Avoidant: This occurs when employees let other employees such as peers, mentors, or human resources representatives know that they plan to leave rather than giving notice to their immediate boss.
- Bridge burning: In this resignation style, employees seek to harm the organization or its members on their way out the door, often through verbal assaults.
- Impulsive quitting: Some employees simply walk off the job, never to return or communicate with their employer again. This can leave the organization in quite a lurch, given it is the only style in which no notice is provided.

The by the book and perfunctory resignations are the most common, but roughly one in 10 employees quits in bridge-burning style. Avoidant, bridge burning and impulsive quitting are seen as potentially harmful resignation styles for employers.

In addition, the researchers found that managers were particularly frustrated by employees who resigned using bridge burning, avoidant or perfunctory styles, so employees who want to leave on good terms should avoid those styles, Klotz said.

The study findings also indicated that managers responded the least negatively to resignations when employees kept them "in the loop" and when employees followed organizational policies regarding resignation. Quitting in these more positive styles is a good idea for employees who want a positive recommendation from a former supervisor or may consider returning to that company one day.

The managers' attitudes toward the perfunctory resignation was a bit surprising, he said, and seemed to be rooted in the fact that employees using that style did not provide reasons for their

decisions to resign.

Each resignation situation is unique to that employee and their relationship to the company, Klotz noted, so the best way to resign at one company may not be the best way to resign at another. But companies would be well-served to review their employee handbooks and update their formal [resignation](#) policies to reflect best practices for current company needs, he said.

Understanding why employees quit in the ways they do is particularly important for companies that could suffer if an employee uses his or her departure as an opportunity to damage the company's reputation or create other problems, Klotz said.

"Turnover is common, it's expensive, it's disruptive and it can be contagious," he said. "But this damage is mitigated when employees resign in a positive manner. So to the extent you can, as an employer, you want to have employees resign in a positive manner."

Companies also should consider monitoring how employees quit for potential signs of management issues. If a number of employees quit in a negative way, that could be a sign of a poor supervisor or other problems with company treatment of employees, he said.

Klotz said he would also like to further study the "lame duck period," between the time an employee gives notice to their last day on the job, to better understand what happens during that period.

"Is it better to just say 'see ya' and pay the employee's salary for two weeks, or is it better to have the person stay for a transition period such as training their replacement?" Klotz said. "It's often a very weird time for the employer and the employee."

More information: Anthony C. Klotz et al. Saying Goodbye: The Nature, Causes, and Consequences of Employee Resignation Styles., *Journal of Applied Psychology* (2016). [DOI: 10.1037/apl0000135](https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000135)

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