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The Right Moves

by Scott Haglund



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After never believing I would leave my first employer, I have just stopped to think I am working for my sixth insurance organization and have held jobs in four states. I don't believe this makes me an expert in moving, but it has given me an opportunity to learn what is important in a company and how to evaluate my life. Here are a few things I've learned from my career travels.

GOALS MATTER

A key consideration is having a direction for your life. Note that I said life, not career. A new job will bring with it new life connections along with the new work responsibilities. You may have volunteer interests in your community you will need to give up to pursue a change in career, so if these are important to you, they need to be considered.

Without a direction, it doesn't matter where you are working.

Alice: Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?

The Cat: That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.

Alice: I don't much care where.

The Cat: Then it doesn't much matter which way you go.

Alice: So long as I get somewhere.

The Cat: Oh, you're sure to do that, if only you walk long enough.

Alice in Wonderland, by Lewis Carroll

If you've taken time to write your goals for both your personal and professional life, they will provide you with insight into what opportunities should be pursued and which ones should be ignored. It's exciting to have someone pursue you for a new position, but the excitement will wear off quickly if the new role is just "more of the same" and does not provide you with what you're looking for.

Career goals, objectives: Spend time thinking about what you would like to accomplish professionally, keeping in mind the amount of

time you want to spend on your career. For example, you may want to become a manager, but may not be willing to spend the additional time management positions usually entail. Work on getting specific, written goals that detail what you would like to be doing as well as the skills you need to develop to get you there. As new positions within and outside your company come about, this will help you decide what makes sense to better achieve your career goals.

Personal goals: Your personal interests can also dictate where you should be working. If you have an activity or group that energizes you and is a passion in your life, a decision needs to be made on what takes precedence—your passion in your personal life or your goals for your career. It's possible that a passion in your current location is not easily found in a new location. Once at a new role, you may discover that fulfillment in your personal life is now missing.

Family goals: As a family, you need to decide what is important to you. If your extended family and their life events are a top priority, then the location and hours needed in your career are important considerations. Without the support of your family, a successful job and location change is difficult, if not impossible. Make sure you define what is important for your family, not just for you.

STRUCTURES MATTER

Although not obvious initially, it will become very clear shortly that you've given up most of your support structure and potentially your spouse and children's entire support structure. In your current position, those supports may now be second nature, but when they are gone, it's very clear what they provided. The support comes from a variety of places.

School, teachers: In your current situation, you are likely comfortable in knowing your child's teachers and how the school operates. You

know what is coming for them in future grades as well as the general flow and calendar of the year. It will take time to build the relationships with both the school and the teachers in a new environment.

Babysitters, child care: When you need a mental health break, you have probably built a network of people that can help you out with your children. Also, if you and your spouse work, arrangements are in place for the necessary child care that you're comfortable and familiar with. It will take time to find those new connections in a different location. You will need to be prepared for a few months of "family time" and potentially few parental breaks.

Doctors: If you or your family have specific medical needs, you will need to consider where doctors are located that deal with that condition. You'll need to research what doctors and specialties are present in the new location before just assuming they are there. It can be difficult to find doctors in new locations, particularly if you don't have existing connections to that area. Once in the new location, you will need to rely on co-workers or other new friends to get recommendations on doctors you can trust for yourself, your spouse and children.

Religion: Your religious network can also be very difficult to leave behind. If you're used to having them share your life and its challenges, that will be a noticeable impact on your mental and spiritual well-being. Similar to the doctors, you can't assume your denomination or affiliation is present in the new area. Depending on the importance this has in your life, this could be a serious consideration as you look at new opportunities. It's not impossible to find these new connections, but you need to be prepared for this loss as you move into a new area.

Friends, parties, clubs: Outside activities are important parts of your life and factor into



your decision on your future direction. These people and events are vital stress relievers. Are you willing to give this up to better meet your career objectives? Again, this outlet isn't gone for good, but may take a while as you get connected in your new role.

Mentors, networks: In any new position, it takes time to get connected with the life blood of the company. Questions that you can answer easily now will become more difficult in a new company structure. You may not know initially who to ask for assistance, and the terminology of the new company may not be familiar to you. In your current role, you may also have natural mentors that are helping you develop and of whom you can ask questions. Again, they are not completely gone from your life, but you may no longer be able to ask the same questions of them that you became accustomed to. Over time, new mentors will come and you will plug into the new network at the company, but you do need to consider this impact.

Overall, the biggest thing is that you will need to be intentional in creating the new support systems.

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Although difficult, you may need to get out of your comfort zone to find the business and social connections needed in the new area. Regardless, the impact that your current support structures have on your life needs to be carefully considered before deciding to make a change.

FAMILIES MATTER

It is your career, but it's also a family career. What you say and do is as important to you as it is to your family and to those close to your family. The cost of the move on your family can be tremendous.

Social Outlets: You will need to think about what you do for “fun” during your week. This could include shopping centers, restaurants, golf courses, playhouses or other activities that are important to you. If you are moving to a different part of the country or world, some of what you do now may not be easily accessible. What you will do outside of work has to be factored into your decision, As part of this social outlet, you may be heavily involved with family events. If the move involved a significant distance, it may no longer be possible to attend most events. Initially this may not seem to be an issue, but over time, you may begin realizing family was more important than you thought.

Friends / Playmates: The ability to just pop over to a friend's house or a next door neighbor for your children is important too. Facebook, Skype and text messages can keep you connected, but that is different than hanging out in their family room. It's not quite like a death, but it can seem like that when the pressures of all the areas mentioned above come to bear at the same time. You will need to at least realize that you may not have their physical support when it is needed the most.

Discussions to have with spouse and family:

1. What are you giving up by leaving your current school? What are you gaining in your new school?

2. Are we willing to sacrifice our time with family and family events?
3. How will we prepare for the life changes—doctors, dentists, child care, housing, busing, additional / fewer cars, etc.?

Discussions to have with yourself:

1. Am I moving away from something or am I moving toward something?
2. If I'm dissatisfied with my current role, have I tried to alter the position with my manager, or even explicitly discussed my issues with my manager?
3. Other than money, what would a new role provide to me?
4. Does this opportunity move me closer to the goals I've set for my life (both personal and professional)? What does this opportunity provide me that I'm not getting today?

I have been fortunate in my career to have opportunities that occurred at the right time and for the right reasons. By knowing what was important in my life, I was able to ignore the opportunities that didn't meet my interests and focus on ones that were truly a good fit.

The balance of professional and personal priorities changes over time, so this is definitely not something you only do once in your life. The goals for your career and the goals of your family need to be reconsidered and discussed throughout your career. The biggest thing to keep aware of is the complete impact change has on both your life and the life of your family. If you prepare before making quick decisions, you will be more likely to find a new opportunity that you don't regret later. ●