

Medium

## Quitting as a Game of Chess

Queen Muse

I didn't have the luxury to quit my job in a blaze of glory. So I meticulously engineered my exit over several months.

Just two days after starting what I believed was a dream job, the education company that hired me laid off several dozen employees. Two weeks after that, my supervisor resigned. I had no idea what was going on, so I asked my soon-to-be-former-boss to lunch to get some answers.

She did not hold back. In an hour's time, I learned about years of employee retention issues, about a nasty culture of favoritism and cliques, and an executive leadership team that passively contributed to it all.

"If you stay, you'll get a lot of experience, but they'll work you like a dog without giving you a penny more in pay," she told me. Surprised by my reaction, she asked, "Didn't you read the Glassdoor reviews?"

I stared shamefully at the remnants of my hoagie, thanked her for her time, and headed back to my cubicle to do just that. And lo and behold, there was a seemingly endless amount of lengthy posts chronicling a poor work culture, lack of diversity, little to no room for advancement, and a "nasty and backstabbing management team" that earned the company a dismal 1.9 out of 5-star rating.

Between the reviews and feedback from my supervisor, I realized I hadn't landed my dream job, but the job from hell. Still, I reasoned I could make the best of it. Maybe things would change; perhaps my former boss was just jaded, I thought. I was wrong.

In just a few weeks, I witnessed a second round of layoffs. I watched opposing workplace cliques spar in team meetings and use personal friendships with senior leadership to get their way. As my former supervisor predicted, my new boss began assigning me responsibilities well above my pay grade, without any mention of a title change or raise. I was promised an office but it never materialized. My ex-supervisor's role remained vacant, and I found myself juggling the workload of two people from a pint-sized cubicle.

I fantasized about a dramatic exit: you know, where I'd tell my boss to kick rocks and sashay off the premises with middle fingers raised proudly in the air and no plans of ever returning. I felt the spirits of Peter Gibbons from *Office Space* and Jerry Maguire rising within me. But deep down I knew I'd never have the gall to follow through. I had bills to pay, children to care for, and the bridges were still too valuable to burn.

So instead of quitting there and then, I spent several months plotting my great escape. With help from my former boss, I updated my resume and LinkedIn page, got new headshots taken, and began my search for a healthier work environment. Though I was taking interviews over lunch breaks, I continued showing up and putting in the work at my hellhole of a job. I took on projects that I loathed and completed them to perfection so I could use them during job interviews. I networked with the higher-ups and made friends with my co-workers so I'd have people to serve as references. Every day I showed up on time with a smile. I revealed no signs of my desire to leave. I was exhausted, underpaid, and underappreciated, but I'd become a vital part of the team. Instead of complaining or storming out, I'd strategically placed myself in the perfect position to make a quiet, elegant departure.

Finally, I landed an amazing offer from one of the company's competitors. The position came with a much higher salary, my own office, and promised autonomy. This time I did the due diligence and checked Glassdoor. The company had great reviews, and I accepted the offer.

That night, I wrote a formal letter of resignation and celebrated my pending departure by drinking a bottle of my favorite red wine. I laughed out loud as I hit send on the email to my boss putting in my two weeks' notice. Sitting there, in the middle of my bedroom floor, I felt as brave as Peter Gibbons when he went rogue.

Through my experience, I learned three things: There's nothing more satisfying than leaving a job that needs you more than you need it; quitting is a game of chess, not checkers—move in silence until you see your checkmate; and *always* check Glassdoor before accepting a job offer. Always!