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## **Plan to walk away.**

Walking away from your position is a positive, healthy inevitability.

You will not live forever. And even if you did, would you want to be doing your job forever? If you plan that you will eventually walk away, if you operate by the “campground rules,” you and your colleagues will be far better off as a result.

Please note: by this I do not mean you should keep one foot out the door at all times. Just operate with the concept that somebody else will have to at some point pick up where you left off. Keeping organized helps quite a bit with this. And the earlier you can develop this mindset, the easier it will be to balance home and work life.

Planning to walk away is a realistic way to consider the long term while living in the now. When you are mired in the day-to-day, it can be easy to get discouraged and forget the big picture! Taking time for planning in addition to getting the work done, and revisiting those plans regularly, can help.

To put another way: at some point you will be fired, leave, or die. If you truly believe in your project, organization, and/or the value of your work, you will make that transition as easy as possible for your colleagues. Not unlike a Swedish Death Cleaning for nonprofit management; doing this is a very kind transitional legacy.

I have had positive and negative transition experiences - being laid off, giving notice, seasonal employment - almost every iteration of termination except for a cold quit or fire. Given the options, a planned transition has always been the most beneficial for my own mental health and the organization I’m leaving. This is consistent for the nonprofits I consult with as well. For anybody holding back for whatever reason, I think there are a number of rationales why you should consider a planned departure:

### 1) You have other passions.

Do you have other hobbies, other areas of interests, other goals beyond your job or within your jobs that you are unable to pursue to the fullest potential - especially while remaining the key person at your organization? I think this is particularly true of nonprofit leaders, who give so much of their time above and beyond the 9-5 workday. By letting go in a healthy, planned transition, you pave the way to success in other areas and other goals.

### 2) You can empower others to find their own leadership.

With a planned departure, you are often able to mentor somebody for your position or help the next person to find their footing. You also possibly have the opportunity break a gender or cultural barrier for another nonprofit leader.

*"If the next executive is a first-timer, which is frequently the case with small to mid-sized agencies, the interim ED can be invaluable in mentoring the rookie ED." - CompassPoint*

3) A planned departure is healthier for the nonprofit.

Transitional leadership for unplanned exits can be costly, not just in terms of staffing, but also potential lost revenue and funding. A planned departure does just that - plans for the next steps, so everybody can be on the same page. Bonus: Occasionally transition funding is available for precisely this type of event.

4) A planned departure is more pleasant than being stuck or worse - being forced out.

Nobody wants a mutiny, and nobody wants to get stuck in quicksand. Planning for transition helps prevent either of those instances, because you set the stages for transition - and often with the help and support of those around you. I also think this creates a healthy degree of separation and mindfulness around your work process. Nobody is forced to depend on you, nor are there any internal or external grandiose illusions that you will be around forever to take care of things.

5) It is an opportunity for growth.

Even beyond other hobbies and passions, stepping away can be an opportunity for personal growth. Challenges that can be found at another organization, working around different parameters, in a different field, or with a new team.

6) It is the easiest on staff.

If there is an unplanned transition or an emergency, staff and others in the organization are the ones left holding the bag. If you are able to make this smooth, it will also likely ease transitional pains on those you work with.

7) You have more control over the narrative.

When you are planning a transition, you are in a position to help guide the story that is shared with friends, funders, constituents, donors. And by this I don't mean you get to sugarcoat a negative departure (though I'm sure that happens in some transitions). By this I mean - you get to be a part of those transactions in a positive way. You get to help facilitate introductions, help colleagues build their networks, and watch other creative relationships grow. Many introverts like me certainly enjoy introducing two people who can then do the rest of the talking.

8) Because things are good!

Seinfeld ended his show at the peak of their ratings, and he has said on numerous occasions this was all about timing. Never did they Jump the Shark or suffer in quality loss. Nonprofit leaders can do this as well, and ensure they are leaving when the organization is healthy, stable, and strong enough to give a new leader a stable foundation.