

February 4, 2007**CAREER COUCH****The Job Transfer: Look Before You Leap****By MATT VILLANO**

Q. Your boss has requested that you transfer to an office in another state. You don't want to uproot your life, but you're afraid that declining the opportunity may ruin your career. What should you do?

A. Hear out your boss, and take some time to ponder the request before reacting. Margaret Morford, president and owner of the HR Edge, a management consulting firm in Nashville, says a little perspective on important decisions can go a long way.

"Nobody is forcing you to respond immediately," she said. "Taking the extra day gives you a chance to get your thoughts together, which guarantees you'll make the choice that's best for you."

Q. Why do companies transfer employees across the country?

A. Staffing issues, like the economics that drive them, often boil down to supply and demand. Most large multinational companies relocate employees between offices to deal with pressing needs. The practice is most common in industries like law, pharmaceuticals and manufacturing.

Q. What should you consider in evaluating a possible transfer?

A. Employees should always weigh the broader professional value of a transfer. David Nour, managing partner of the Nour Group, a consulting firm in Atlanta, noted that transfers often raise an employee's importance to an organization. Willingness to accept a transfer, Mr. Nour added, usually shows initiative and determination, characteristics that can aid in career advancement.

"Education is a lifelong process, and you never know where that next great lesson will come from," he said. "In many cases, a transfer can help create new experiences that you wouldn't have otherwise."

Consider practical issues, too. If you have young children or a spouse who is not willing to move, a transfer is obviously not feasible. And if you are watching expenses and will not receive help with relocation costs, a transfer can be a recipe for financial ruin.

Q. Is it wise to share concerns about the transfer with your boss?

A. That depends on the concerns. If your worries are strictly professional, raise them in the form of candid questions and give the boss a chance to respond to each. For concerns of a more personal nature, you may not want to be too specific unless you have opened up to your boss before; even then, it's perfectly acceptable to remain vague.

Whatever you decide to share, take a positive approach, maintain a respectful tone and don't sound accusatory or defensive.

Lee Miller, president of NegotiationPlus.com, a consulting firm in Morristown, N.J., said these subtle signals could be the difference between a frustrating conversation and one that ends happily. "This is one of those few times where it's just as much about what you say as it is about how you say it," he said. "Make clear that no matter what, you're committed to the company and you want to continue to contribute however they'll let you do so."

Q. Should you suggest alternatives to the transfer?

A. It can't hurt. Michelle Tillis Lederman, founder of Executive Essentials, a corporate training company in New York, said that any effort to collaborate on a solution shows that you are willing to do whatever you must to contribute to the company's overall success.

Perhaps the most common substitute for relocation is a telecommuting arrangement. Another option is a modified transfer assignment — say, spending three or four days working from a satellite office and the rest of the week from home.

A third choice is to see if the opportunity for a transfer can be tabled until your situation changes.

A year ago, Juan Carlos Blacker, campus director at InsideTrack, an educational coaching company in San Francisco, was asked by managers at the company to transfer to a new office in Portland, Ore. He declined the offer for personal reasons, but asked his boss to consider him for future transfers. Mr. Blacker then made the move in November, after his wife's employer decided to open an office in Portland as well.

“Eventually,” he said, “the company got what it wanted and I advanced my career.”

Q. What might happen if you flat-out reject the request?

A. Your reputation could disintegrate quickly, with many managers branding you as selfish and uninterested in being a team player.

Kerry Patterson, chief development officer at VitalSmarts, a training and development company in Provo, Utah, said that this change in perception could lead to a reduction in plum assignments and to an overall feeling of alienation.

“It can get ugly pretty fast,” he said. “Once you’ve rejected the offer, you definitely open yourself up to the kind of treatment that will have you thinking about looking for another job.”

In some instances, employees are even fired for rejecting transfers. John Levy, a partner at Henson & Effron, a law firm in Minneapolis, said that in states where employees are hired “at will,” it’s perfectly legal for a company to fire an employee for any number of reasons, so long as the dismissal is not because of discrimination over race, religion, gender or other factors.

With so much at risk, employees who are confident in their decision to reject the transfer simply may want to consider seeking a job elsewhere, said Nancy Widmann, president of NCW, an executive coaching firm in New York.

“If you are comfortable with your reasons, then you made the correct decision for you and your family,” said Ms. Widmann, the former president of [CBS](#) Radio. “If not — if the fit is not right — it might just be the time to prepare your exit strategy and move on from there.”

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