

Coping with changes of employment



A few weeks ago, Boeing completed the sale of the Rocketdyne operation, where I work, to Pratt & Whitney. P&W (part of UTC) is the ninth company I've worked for in the last (almost) 40 years. I carefully picked my first job in 1966, interviewing with and comparing dozens of companies. I chose RCA—mainly because it had so many knowledgeable engineers, an opinion that only got stronger during the 15 years I worked there. The eight employment changes I've experienced include one resignation and two incidents in which I managed to lay myself off. Both were plant closures. I was sold, along with the furniture and facilities, on the other five occasions.

It will take a while before the dust settles and we really understand our situations with our new ownership. But, based on past experience, I expect to benefit from the change. Each of the previous changes has exposed me to product types and design challenges I'd never before encountered, resulting in a relatively wide range of engineering experience that has worked to my benefit. It keeps life interesting. But you need to have the right attitude to go through these changes without damage.

The first time a company leaves you, or asks you to leave, you might find that your feelings are hurt. After all, you carefully chose this company, identified

with it, and intended to stay indefinitely. In the '50s and '60s, it was not at all unusual to encounter engineers who were about to retire after working 45 years for the same company. That situation is becoming unusual, at least in the private sector. Acquisitions, mergers, bankruptcy, plant closings, and relocations are just some of the reasons that you might find yourself working for a new company.

First impressions of new ownership are frequently negative. The benefits, policies, procedures, and organizations might differ. Some of your favorite managers might be pushed aside—or out. You can always pick up your stuff

and leave, of course, but that choice might not be the best. And sulking won't help. I've always given the new situation a year to sort itself out, and, with one exception, I've been satisfied with the new company. You should enjoy your work, as much as is possible. If a company makes every task an onerous ordeal, it's time to move on. There's nothing wrong with being skeptical of new ownership, but you should try to avoid being cynical. If you can be patient for a year, keep an open mind, and be flexible enough to accommodate some changes, things are likely to work out.

When you separate from a company through a layoff or resignation, try to stay in touch with the best and brightest that you worked with there. Similarly, if some of them leave and you stay, get a home e-mail address or phone number of those you hold in high esteem and follow up every six months or so with a call or note. Nowadays, they call it networking. I always thought it was just common sense. Maybe I was just lucky, but I've never missed a day's pay or collected unemployment, largely because I knew key people in other companies who would gladly recommend me to their management.

If you're an engineer in the private sector, it's likely that you have experienced or will experience a change of employment. Try not to stress out about it or make decisions without sufficient data. Treat it like a design assignment: Examine your requirements and the new environment, look at your options, do the trades, and make an informed decision on how to proceed. That's what I've always done—even going to the trouble of building a spreadsheet on occasion. Give it a try—and take your time. **EDN**

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