



# SAYING GOODBYE

## Thoughts on How to Depart from Extension

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At some point everyone will have to leave their position with UW Extension. You'll collect your personal items, send final emails, turn in your keys and say goodbyes to clientele, colleagues, stakeholders and administrators. Before those moments come, there are some things to consider and plan for – for both yourself and for the health of the programming in your area. To improve the process of departure, consider these points.

### BEGIN WELL

The first person to tell about your resignation is your boss – it would be a discourtesy for he or she to learn about it any other way. You might begin by telling him or her (the associate director) in conversation. But at the formal level, you will need to send a letter of resignation to the Director of Extension (see below).

Extension personnel should give as much advance notice as possible prior to resignation/retirement, preferably not less than 30 days. The employee should submit a letter of resignation to the Director, with copies to their immediate supervisor, and other parties as applicable; i.e., county coordinator, and Board of County Commissioners. The letter should include the date of the last day of employment.

Departures often begin by letting colleagues and supervisors know that you are planning for a departure. When an employee has a confirmed end date for employment, then he or she can share it with colleagues. Keep in mind that if leaving is tentative, then do not submit a written letter until the departure is confirmed. Announcements of intended resignations or retirements often cause clientele and collaborative partners to be wary of planning any future programs.

Another aspect of beginning to depart well is to visit with the University human resources office about setting a specific date to leave. They can assist you in minimizing the amount of time you have to wait between your last salary check and your first retirement check (if retiring) and getting full use of your remaining annual and sick leave. Employees should also contact the Ag Business Office, where official termina-



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EXTENSION

tion papers are completed. This individual will also need to know if you desire a lump-sum payment for unused annual leave or plan to go on terminal leave and continue receiving a pay check until all annual leave is depleted. Another person to contact is the UW Employee Benefits office on campus (the manager at this writing is Eric Goldenstein, [epgold@uwyo.edu](mailto:epgold@uwyo.edu) or 766-2437). The office can help you through every step. Any communication with this office is confidential.

Prepare for the transition. The time between when you leave and the position is filled again is often between three to six months. In that time no programs or contact with the public and stakeholders occurs. With a vacant position, ties to the public are minimal, and relationships with supporting bodies like the county commissioners decline. Thus the incoming educator will likely have more work to do to build and repair relationships. In addition, the new educator may know very little about the community and the program which you and your predecessors developed.

Lay the groundwork for the transition by tying up loose ends with your Extension work and collecting information for your successor to use. Specific things to do before leaving include the items below.\*

- a. Have the office (including desk, meeting rooms and other areas) in good order.
- b. Leave on file inventories of references, tools and equipment. All UW or County purchased equipment, computers, I-pads, cameras or other items purchased with non-personal funds should be returned to the office.
- c. Leave a spot map of the community showing participants in Extension programs.
- d. Have on file the names of members of advisory councils.
- e. Have on file a copy of the reports sent to stakeholder groups such as county commissions and advisory councils.
- f. Have on file a list of organizations and places of meetings relevant to the work.
- g. Leave a copy of recommendations of things to be done in the community, programs to be offered and the like.
- h. Provide a list of contacts (or an introduction if possible) to networks of clientele
- i. Have on file a record of past programming efforts.
- j. Get your files organized to pass on to someone else, including:
  - i. Computer files
  - ii. Paper files
  - iii. Emails
- k. Create a calendar that contains:
  - i. Typical activities in which you engage (attending county commissioner meetings, planning deadlines and activities for the county fair, regular meetings of stakeholder groups).
  - ii. The end date of memberships and subscriptions, so that they can be renewed.
- l. Create a list of websites and passwords relevant to your work. Don't forget to include active and archived surveys such as at the UW Survey Tool or SurveyMonkey sites.
- m. Create a list of email lists organizations in the community/region/nation/profession of which you are a member.

- n. Create a list of contacts – people in the community who perhaps helped open doors for you, and who could do the same for someone else. (On the other hand, it is probably better to not create a list of people to avoid – that might be considered defamation of character.)
- o. Label keys that you have been issued.
- p. Discuss with your supervisor reports that should be completed prior to your departure. Time and Contact reports should be up to date, and annual summaries and impact statements may be required depending on the end date of employment.

Some of this information might be uncovered by a successor through the associate director, office staff, initiative team members, and others. However, no one but yourself knows it all. Take time to put things in order to smooth the continuation and development of programming efforts.

Note that your successor will likely not wish to, or be able to, engage in all the programming you offered. But keep in mind that if he or she doesn't even know about what has been a typical part of your job, then community and personal relationships are likely to suffer as the transition proceeds.

## WRITE A RESIGNATION LETTER

Writing a letter to the Director of Extension resigning your position falls into the category of professional courtesy. In cases in which a transition is planned for, Extension may advertise the opening and start the search for a replacement while the resigning educator is still working. This minimizes the time between the filled positions – the county and area clientele might have a very short gap in service and area educators would not have to cover work for an extended period of time. Without a letter of resignation, Extension can't begin the search for a replacement. Make the letter short and gracious. There is no need for a public record of why you quit or your aspirations. What does need to be in the letter is the date your work will end.

A good resignation letter is written in a positive manner; in other words, always leave friends behind, not enemies. Try to behave with compassion and humanity, even if you are leaving under less than positive circumstances. Additionally, by keeping a resignation letter positive you avoid risk of libel or defamation, which carry potential legal liabilities for employee and employer.

A positive resignation letter also increases the likelihood that your supervisor will provide a good reference for you if you need one. As a general rule, the more support you need from your boss, the more positive and appreciative you should be. As a general rule, give oral notification of your resignation first, then follow up with a confirmation resignation letter to the Director of Extension, with a copy to the Associate Director. Obviously, if the thought of having this discussion face-to-face worries you, then don't do it – just write the letter.

## FOR THE 4H EDUCATOR

The County 4-H program doesn't stop in the absence of the 4H educator. Ensure that your support staff, supervisor, area educator living in your county and key leaders and club leaders have the necessary dates, materials and contact information. The county support staff and the state 4-H Office play an important role in connecting the 4H program between "old" and "new" educators. Preparing a calendar of upcoming county activities can help them help your county clientele and colleagues.

## REVIEW FILES

Having program files up to date can be a tremendous help to a new educator. Files can provide information on past committees, agendas, resources used, program content and evaluations. Files should be organized so they are easily accessed. Explain to administrative assistants where information on events and programs can be found.

Set aside items of historical interest. As you go through the collected files in your office, you may come across items like papers, photographs, bulletins, teaching resources, slide sets (actual 35mm slides, let alone PowerPoint files), notes, minutes, trinkets and other ephemera that provide insights on the work of your office over time. Consider passing them on to someone else in the organization (an interested colleague or the state office) or a county or state historical association. Just don't let them be lost!

## SAY GOODBYE

When it is time to leave, you've got to say goodbye. Many people from UW Extension send a note of farewell. This is often a short note telling colleagues that they are leaving the organization. It might include reasons for their departure (be it family changes, the opportunity to pursue other work opportunities, or other reasons), future contact information (email or mailing address), and an expression of thanks for the opportunity to work together.

As you go, it may be tempting to comment about the people you work with, particularly if the work relationships were not good. Nevertheless, be careful what you say because you never know what may happen – you may even end up wanting to come back.

Final moments. Every office will have its own expectations for the departure of a member of staff. Things to be expected include turning in keys, resetting the voicemail, and shutting down email. It may be that the remaining staff will plan an office party, depending on the circumstances of the departure. Maintaining professionalism throughout your departure is positive for you, colleagues, and extension stakeholders.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Other considerations for people who leave include decisions about:

- Continuing health coverage under COBRA,
- Accessing retirement benefits (to draw from or roll over), and
- What to do with remaining vacation and sick leave.

These are best addressed by having conversations with UW's Employee Benefits office and your plan providers.

Hopefully, you will have time to depart from a position in a way that will not burden both yourself and those left to carry on after you.

*\* The content of this list is owed in part to Glen Charles Cook's 1947 book A Handbook on Teaching Vocational Agriculture. Fifth edition. The Interstate. Danville, Illinois. Pages 37-38: Duties of a Teacher before Leaving Department.*

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