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**Lessons learned from Belinda's flip**

*Belinda Stronach's defection offers insights on the right and wrong ways to make a career move, WALLACE IMMEN finds*

WALLACE IMMEN  
 Friday, May 20, 2005

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Belinda Stronach's abrupt and extremely public defection to the competition in the midst of a crisis this week offers lessons about the right and wrong ways to make a strategic career move.

Here is what the experts have to say:

**Be discreet**

It's never wise to leave a career the way Ms. Stronach left the Tories -- dropping the news on her boyfriend, deputy Conservative leader Peter MacKay, and then party leader Stephen Harper just hours before she appeared on national television to make her bombshell announcement alongside her new boss, Prime Minister Paul Martin, says organizational psychologist Guy Beaudin, managing director of RHR International Co. in Toronto.

At the very least, you should give your company notice and time to react, Mr. Beaudin says.

In fact, it's a good idea to keep any misgivings you have about the place you are leaving to yourself -- or word can spread that you are vengeful and unprofessional. Talk only about the opportunity you are going toward, not your past unhappiness, he advises.

**Don't badmouth the boss**

In her short political career, Ms. Stronach has uttered harsh words about both Mr. Harper and Mr. Martin.

That's a no-no. "Canada is a very small community and you should never make negative comments about your previous boss" -- who you, one day, may cross paths with again, Mr. Beaudin says.

**News**

from THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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"The maxim is burn no bridges. You should always follow the rule that you want to maintain positive relationships with all of your employers."

#### **Consider the timing**

The worst time to leave an organization is in the middle of a crucial event or project where your loss may lead to failure.

As the all-important budget vote loomed, Ms. Stronach's "timing was awful," says Ian Roberge, a professor of public administration at York University in Toronto.

"Especially if you have leadership ambitions, it is very important to be seen as someone who can be counted on in a crisis," he says.

#### **Consider the optics**

Detractors saw Ms. Stronach's move as part of her ambition to climb as high and as fast as possible. That can make you a target for others whose own ambitions you may threaten, says Jack Muskat, a principal and organizational psychologist with Knightsbridge GSW in Toronto.

To avoid them, always emphasize you have done your best in your previous position and there are solid reasons beyond personal ambition for your decision.

Stress that you have an opportunity to make a much bigger contribution elsewhere and thank the people you have worked with.

#### **Ensure a fit**

Ms. Stronach had misgivings early on about the party she had joined and discordance over its leadership and values.

The lesson: Ensure a fit before ever signing on, Mr. Beaudin says.

"When they are choosing a place to work, people often neglect to ask enough about the culture, values and the leadership style," Mr. Beaudin says.

"We know if there is a discrepancy in any of these areas, sooner or later the situation will be come untenable," he adds.

He suggests going beyond the standard job interviews and scheduling casual meetings with your potential boss and peers.

#### **Assess your support**

Ms. Stronach made clear as early as last year's leadership campaign that she believed the party needed to adjust its policies.

Her inability to persuade Mr. Harper to her point of view signals that if you join an organization with the idea of making changes from within, you must also make sure that there is support for such change from the top as well as the rest of the team, Mr. Beaudin says.

#### **Change is good**

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As radical as Ms. Stronach's move was, change is often necessary for someone who wants to get ahead.

And you can't let loyalties to your team stop you from going after what you want, says executive coach Martin Buckland, president of Elite Résumés in Oakville, Ont.

"Companies can no longer offer guaranteed jobs for life, so it has become standard advice of career coaches that your prime loyalty should be to yourself," he says.

From the time you start a new position, you should be planning your next step and how well the organization supports your ultimate career needs, Mr. Buckland adds.

#### **Land softly**

Ms. Stronach is getting the crash course in change this week. And she probably found out something else critical to career success: How you handle the first few days in a new position is critical, says Tim Cork, president of NexCareer, a career-consulting firm in Toronto.

To gain alliances and support, it's important to stress you are coming to help the new organization, not escaping from a bad situation.

"The first thing coming through the door is carry a positive attitude and . . . show you are anxious to make a contribution," Mr. Cork says.

#### **It's performance that counts**

Ms. Stronach clearly has gained a lot of attention on her move up her career ladder. But she must now quickly demonstrate solid results for her new employer, Mr. Muskat says.

"You only keep support if you are talented enough to continue to deliver," he says.

"We're willing to put up with prima donnas if they bring a great deal of value to the organization. . .but, at some point, even a Pavarotti loses his voice. "

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