

Leave like President Nixon

By Rose Jonas, Ph.D.

When people leave jobs, they often write a long, serious letter to the boss, the president, the board chair. The letter describes company flaws, warns of opportunities being wasted, or intones what the next person in this job *must* do to be successful. They feel a great sense of relief in delivering it, as if they've taken care of some noble duty.

Want to know how much it matters? Put together the tips of your index finger and thumb. See the zero? You got it! That effort generally has no significant impact. Once you're gone, the effect is as if you pulled a finger from a glass of water. A little ripple, then a smooth surface again. Oh, the farewell party speeches will laud your accomplishments and wonder how the organization will go on, but - in fact - it begins reshaping around you the moment you announce your leaving. The focus is on what the job will become and what the new person will do with it, not what the leaver thought about it. It's a human trait to forge toward the future rather than reflect on the past. Companies go on quite well without us. A difficult truth.

Don't waste your time and psychic energy, therefore, on wasteful work. I know you think it's vital to pass along this information, but I promise you, it is almost always regarded casually, if at all.

Just remember that when Richard Nixon resigned from the presidency of the United States, he left one of the most impactful jobs on the planet. Bedeviled by the press for two years after a pre-election Watergate complex break-in sanctioned by his re-election committee, accused by the citizenry of abuse of power, angry at the lack of recognition for his accomplishments on the world stage, and on the verge of impeachment, he had plenty to say. How did he go? He wrote these 17 words to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger on August 9, 1974: "Dear Mr. Secretary: I hereby resign the Office of President of the United States. Sincerely, Richard Nixon."

Simplicity did the job for him. It should do the job for you.

If the people around you want more information before you go, they'll ask for it.