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INSIGHT

Resign Well and Protect Your Reputation



Introduction

Facilities management is a small world. The same names turn up at industry events, on contractor panels, on client sites and on the other side of the table at the next interview. The head of estates you leave this year may be the person who sits on your selection panel in five years' time.

That makes the way you resign a career decision, not just an admin task. A clean exit leaves you with a reference you can rely on, colleagues who recommend you and a door that stays open. A messy one can undo years of good work in a fortnight, and the story travels faster than most people expect.

The good news is that resigning well is a skill with a clear method. You do not need to be clever or especially diplomatic. You need to be prepared, calm and consistent: know your position, say the right thing to the right person in the right order, protect the operation while you work your notice, and leave nothing behind that anyone has to clear up.

This guide walks through that method for FM and estates professionals, from the checks you make before you speak to the conversations you have after you have left. It is practical rather than legal, so where your contract or circumstances are complicated, take advice from a qualified employment adviser.

Before you say a word: be sure and be ready

The worst resignations are the ones made in the heat of a bad week, or the ones that were never really a decision. Before you speak to anyone, make sure you have actually decided, and that the move is secure.

That means a written offer you have read, accepted in the way the new employer requires, with any conditions identified. Many roles in FM are subject to references, security screening, right-to-work checks, qualification checks or similar. If those are not cleared, think carefully about timing. Resigning before you are unconditional leaves you exposed if something falls over.

One more test before you go ahead: could you tell your current manager the real reason you are leaving, calmly, without notes? If not, you are not ready, because that is the conversation you are about to have.

- Get the offer in writing and check the start date, salary, benefits and role title.
- Find out what conditions remain, and when they are expected to clear.
- Be honest with yourself about why you are going, so you are not talked out of it by a single conversation.
- Decide in advance what you would need to hear to stay, and whether that is realistic.
- Have a rough view of the timeline for notice, leave and handover.

If you have any doubt, wait. A delayed resignation costs you a few days. A withdrawn one costs you trust on both sides.

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The best moves are considered ones



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Read your contract and know your obligations

Your contract, and any staff handbook it refers to, will set the rules for the way you leave. Read it properly before you resign, not after. You are looking for four things.

First, the notice period. Senior FM and estates roles often carry notice longer than the statutory minimum, and the new employer's start date needs to fit around it. Second, any clause that allows the employer to put you on garden leave or pay in lieu. Third, restrictive covenants such as non-solicitation or non-dealing terms, which can apply to clients, suppliers or colleagues. Fourth, confidentiality and return-of-property duties.

If you hold a professional membership, a safety-critical appointment or a named duty on the site, such as a nominated responsible person, check how that appointment is transferred. Leaving a statutory role vacant without a named successor is a problem you should help solve, not leave behind.

- Check what counts as notice and who you give it to.
- Check how holiday owed or taken in advance will be treated.
- Check any clauses on bonuses, benefits and repayment of training costs.
- Check what you must return and by when: laptop, keys, passes, vehicles, data.
- Do not take documents, contacts or systems data that belong to the business.

If the terms are unclear or restrictive, take advice from an employment solicitor or your union before you resign. Keeping to your obligations is not only a legal point. It is part of how you will be remembered.

Tell the right person first, face to face

Your line manager should hear it from you before anyone else, and in person if at all possible. A call or video meeting is acceptable if you are on different sites, but not an email, text or message through a colleague.

Book a short meeting at a calm moment, not at the start of an inspection week or in the middle of a major incident. Make it private. Do not signal the subject in advance beyond saying you would like a quiet word.

Have your message ready and keep it short. Say you have accepted another role, give your notice, thank them for what you have learned and say you want the handover to be as smooth as possible. That is it. You do not have to explain the whole decision, and the more you explain, the more openings you create for a debate.

Expect a range of reactions: surprise, disappointment, sometimes irritation. None of them need a response beyond calm and courtesy. If the conversation turns heated, say you understand and suggest picking it up tomorrow.

- Open with the decision, not with a lead-in.
- Say thank you and mean it, naming one thing you valued.
- Confirm that a formal letter will follow.
- Offer to agree the handover plan together.
- Do not tell colleagues until your manager has agreed what is said and when.

A manager who hears it first, in person, and sees you stay calm will usually repay you with a good reference. One who hears it from the grapevine rarely does.

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Know the brief before the shortlist



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Put it in writing: keep the letter short and final

Follow the conversation with a formal resignation letter or email the same day. Its job is to create a clear record, not to tell a story. State that you are resigning, the date you are giving notice, your understanding of your last working day and your thanks.

Everything that is not needed should be left out. Do not list grievances, compare the two employers or hint at what you could have been offered to stay. A letter is a permanent document, and it may be read by people who were not in the room. Write it as if the chief executive will see it.

Keep your own paperwork straight too. Note the date you gave notice, the date you were told your last day would be and anything agreed verbally about holiday or early release. A short follow-up email confirming those points avoids disputes later.

- Address it to the person named in your contract.
- State the notice period you are giving and the last working day as you understand it.
- Keep the tone warm, neutral and brief.
- Say nothing about the new employer beyond what is necessary.
- Keep a copy and confirm when it was received.

If you want a ready-made format, a simple resignation letter template does the job, and the point of it is that it is dull. Dull is good. Your reputation is built in the weeks that follow, not in the letter.

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Ask better questions, hire better people



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Handle the counter-offer before it arrives

In a market where good FM and estates people are hard to replace, many resignations are met with a counter-offer, a promise or an emotional appeal. Plan for it, because it is the moment resignations most often go wrong.

Decide beforehand what you would do. If the reasons you are leaving are about money, a counter-offer may seem attractive, but ask whether the money was the real reason. If they were about the role, the culture, the manager or the career path, then an extra payment does not change them. It also means your employer now knows you were willing to leave, and that can quietly change how you are seen.

A useful test is to ask what has changed in the underlying situation, other than the number. If the answer is nothing, treat the offer as flattery, thank them and decline.

Be equally careful about the quieter version, when a senior leader asks you to lunch and talks about 'what it would take'. Treat the invitation as a counter-offer and respond in the same way.

- Be polite, brief and consistent: 'I am grateful, but my decision is made.'
- Do not negotiate against yourself or invite an offer.
- Do not accept a verbal promise of future change without written terms.
- Remember that the new employer is also relying on your word.
- If you do consider staying, take time and think about it overnight.

There is a fuller discussion of this in our guide to counter-offers. The short version: the choice is yours, but make it deliberately, and do not let guilt make it for you.

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Candour saves everyone time



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Protect the operation: a handover that people thank you for

In facilities, a poor handover has consequences that go beyond inconvenience. Missed inspections, lapsed certificates and unanswered contractor queries can become safety or compliance issues, and your name will be attached to them.

Start your handover plan in the first week. Agree with your manager what has to be completed, what has to be passed on and what can safely be left. Write things down, because your memory will leave with you.

A fair test of a handover: could a competent stranger run your area for a fortnight using only your notes? If the answer is no, the notes are not finished.

- A live list of open jobs, deadlines, inspections and statutory renewals.
- Contractor contacts, contract dates, service levels and any disputes in progress.
- Where compliance records, drawings, O&M manuals and passwords are held.
- Budget status, committed spend and outstanding purchase orders.
- The people issues: who needs support, who is performing, who has concerns.
- Key relationships and the preferences of the stakeholders you have looked after.

Walk your successor, or your team, through the list rather than just emailing it. Introduce them to the contractors and the client contacts you rely on. People remember the colleague who made the next person's first month easier.

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Good careers start with a call



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Work your notice like a professional

The weeks between resigning and leaving are the part that people remember. Work them well and your departure is a footnote. Work them badly and it becomes the headline.

Maintain your standards. Turn up, do the work, keep the safety culture you built and do not start leaving early or going quiet. Some employers will ask you to leave immediately or work from home, or put you on garden leave. If so, accept it graciously and comply with the terms, even if it feels like a snub.

If your team is upset by your departure, give them a clear message: the work matters, the standards stay, and you will help the next person succeed. That steadies people more than any reassurance about why you are leaving.

- Do not gossip about the new employer or the reasons for leaving.
- Do not criticise the business, your manager or colleagues, in person or online.
- Do not recruit colleagues or approach clients in breach of your contract.
- Do not delete files, emails or data, and do not forward business information to personal accounts.
- Do keep your team informed on what happens next and who to go to.

If you are asked to stay on a little longer to finish a project, think about whether you can do it without damaging the new start. A reasonable, honest conversation with the new employer usually works. A last-minute change you did not warn them about does not.

The exit interview and the farewell

Exit interviews are a chance to be useful, and also a chance to burn a bridge. Treat them as the first. Be honest, constructive and specific, and avoid anything that sounds like score-settling.

A good test is whether you would be comfortable if every word were read back to the person you are talking about. If it is a serious concern, such as a safety issue, a conduct matter or a legal worry, raise it through the right channel properly, not in a leaving speech. If you are unsure how, take advice.

On your last day, say thank you to people individually, including those who are not your friends. Contractors, security staff, cleaners and reception teams are part of the operation and part of your reputation. Send a short note to your manager and the senior people you worked with, and offer to stay in touch. Connect on professional networks only after you have left, and keep the post short and positive.

Resist the temptation to use the farewell to make a point. A kind, brief goodbye is the last impression you will make on a room full of people who may one day be your clients, suppliers or employers.

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Succession starts long before the vacancy



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After you leave: references, relationships and your reputation

Your reputation does not stop when your pass is deactivated. The first ninety days at the new employer will include comparisons with your old one, and it is tempting to talk about what you left behind. Resist. Say as little as you can that is negative, and a lot that is positive.

Stay in touch in small, sincere ways. Congratulate former colleagues on promotions, share useful contacts and answer a call when someone asks for advice. In a specialist sector, favours are remembered.

Finally, ask for the reference while the memory is fresh. Agree who will give it, what they are comfortable saying and whether they would be willing to be named for future moves. A manager who has been treated well is usually generous.

If your departure involved something difficult, such as a dispute, a redundancy or a poor relationship with your manager, think about how you will describe it to future employers. A short, factual and fair account, with no blame attached, is always better than silence or a rant. Take advice if the circumstances are sensitive.

If a former employer asks you to return in future, you will be glad that you left properly. Many senior people in FM come back to old organisations, and the way they left decides how they are welcomed.

Your resignation checklist

- [ ] Confirm the offer in writing and know which conditions remain.
- [ ] Read your contract for notice, garden leave, covenants and return of property.
- [ ] Take advice if any of your terms are unclear or restrictive.
- [ ] Decide in advance how you will respond to a counter-offer.
- [ ] Tell your line manager first and in person, with a short prepared message.
- [ ] Send a brief, positive resignation letter the same day.
- [ ] Agree what is said to the team and when.
- [ ] Write a live handover covering compliance, contractors, budgets and people.
- [ ] Keep standards high and criticism to yourself during notice.
- [ ] Say thank you individually, and ask for your reference before you go.

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Right person, right moment



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Next steps

Resigning well is mostly about restraint. Be clear, be grateful, be thorough and leave the commentary for another day. Do that, and you will keep the relationships and references that matter more than any single job.

Your next step: read your contract today, even if you are not yet ready to resign, so that nothing in it surprises you later. Maxwell Stephens is a specialist Facilities Management recruitment consultancy.

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