



2026

Should You Stay or Should You Go?

Is It Time to Move On: Making Smarter Career Decisions

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What You Will Learn

- How to recognise the signals that a career move could genuinely be the right step for you
- Why the counteroffer trap catches so many professionals off guard
- A straightforward framework for making a clear-headed career decision under current market conditions
- How working with a specialist recruiter changes the quality of options available to you

At some point, almost every professional reaches a moment of pause. The role that once motivated you feels different. The team, the leadership, or the culture has shifted. The trajectory you pictured when you took the job no longer looks the same from where you are standing.

Or perhaps nothing dramatic has changed, and yet you find yourself wondering whether there is something better suited to where you want to be next. You are not unhappy enough to act, but not satisfied enough to stop asking the question.

Research suggests this is far more common than most people admit. Around two-thirds of workers say they carry some form of career regret. That is a striking number. It reflects how often professionals stay too long, accept too little, or make a move without a clear enough reason.

This guide is designed to help professionals think through that decision with clarity. Whether you are actively exploring your options or simply asking the question quietly, a structured approach will serve you better than a reactive one.

The signals that deserve attention

Not every difficult month is a reason to leave. Challenging periods are part of any career, and working through them often builds capability that makes you more valuable over time. The distinction worth drawing is between temporary difficulty and structural misalignment.

Structural misalignment looks like this: you are consistently passed over for development opportunities that others receive. The people you respect most are leaving, and the quality of those replacing them is falling. Your contribution is not recognised in any meaningful way. You cannot identify a credible path forward in the organisation, regardless of how long you stay.

The Gallup State of the Global Workplace 2026 report identified a significant and sustained decline in employee engagement, with millions fewer engaged workers than in previous years. The sharpest drops were linked to poor management, limited development opportunities, and the removal of flexible working arrangements.

These are not minor frustrations. When they become the consistent experience of your working week rather than occasional setbacks, they are telling you something worth listening to. Dismissing them does not make them go away.

One useful test: ask yourself whether the situation can be improved. Have you had a direct, specific conversation about what you need to stay engaged and make progress? In many cases, that conversation has not happened. If it has, and nothing has changed, that too is data about the organisation you are working within.

The case for staying

Leaving is not always the right answer, and it is worth being honest about that. There are times when staying is the more strategic decision, both for your career and for your longer-term reputation in a sector.

If you are mid-way through a significant project, stepping away before completion can shape how that period is discussed in future interviews. Finishing what you started, particularly when it was challenging, is a mark of credibility in most hiring conversations.

Market timing also matters. In the UK, job postings are currently running around 19% below pre-pandemic levels. That does not mean strong professionals cannot find excellent roles. It means the market is more competitive than it was a few years ago, and moving into a tighter market for unclear reasons carries risk.

Staying can make sense if the issues are specific and fixable. Development conversations, adjustments to scope, progression timelines, and flexible working arrangements have all been successfully negotiated by professionals who chose to address the problem directly before deciding to leave.

The critical question is whether what is frustrating you is structural or situational. Situational problems respond to action. Structural ones rarely do. If the culture does not value what you bring, if progression is systematically blocked, or if the leadership approach is fundamentally misaligned with how you work best, those conditions tend to persist.

The counteroffer trap

If you have already begun exploring options and your current employer responds with a counteroffer, approach that moment with care.

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If you have already begun exploring options and your current employer responds with a counteroffer, approach that moment with care. The data on counteroffers is consistent and worth understanding before you are in that position.

Research indicates that most professionals who accept a counteroffer go on to leave within 18 months, regardless. The salary increases or revised title address a symptom. It does not address the underlying reasons you were considering leaving in the first place.

There are also less obvious consequences to accepting. Once you have signalled that you are open to leaving, your position within the organisation can shift in ways that are rarely stated openly. Succession planning conversations, senior investment decisions, and the informal trust that shapes day-to-day opportunity can all be affected.

That does not mean every counteroffer should be declined without thought. Occasionally, they represent a genuine shift in how the business values the individual. But those situations are the exception. The question to ask is whether the reasons you wanted to leave have actually changed, or whether a financial gesture has temporarily quietened them.

If an employer needed a resignation letter before offering you what you were worth, that is worth reflecting on carefully before you decide to stay.

A practical framework for the decision

Rather than making the decision on emotion alone, applying a structured set of criteria gives you a more reliable basis for whatever you decide.

Start by scoring your current role honestly against what matters most to you: career development, salary/package, culture and environment, flexible working arrangements, the quality of leadership above you, and alignment with your longer-term direction. Be honest in that assessment rather than generous.

Next, consider whether you are moving toward something specific or simply moving away from discomfort. These are different decisions. A reactive move made to escape frustration often lands you in a different version of the same problem within 18 to 24 months.

Third, factor in what a move would require of you. Notice periods, non-competes, project commitments, and the time required for a proper job search are all real considerations. Moving in a rushed or poorly timed way can undermine an otherwise good decision.

Finally, consider whether you have the full picture of what is available to you. Most professionals make this decision based on what they can see on job boards and professional networks. That is a partial view of the market, not a complete one.

What the market looks like right now

Every sector has its own market dynamics, and understanding them clearly is part of making a well-informed decision rather than one based on assumption.

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Broadly, the UK candidate market is more competitive than it was three years ago. That does not mean strong professionals are not in demand. It means the quality of your preparation and the clarity of your positioning matter more than they did when the market was more buoyant.

Flexible and hybrid working continues to shape how candidates and employers approach conversations. Research shows that a significant proportion of professionals would actively seek a new role if remote or hybrid arrangements were removed. In most discussions, this is no longer a point of negotiation. It is a baseline expectation that needs to be established clearly at the outset of any process.

Salary expectations have also shifted. AI is changing role requirements across most professional functions, and the skills that attract the strongest packages in your sector today may not be the same ones that did so three years ago. Understanding current salary benchmarks matters before you move.

The professionals who navigate this market well are those who understand the full range of what is available to them, not just what appears on public job boards.

Why specialist support changes the outcome

Many of the strongest roles are filled before they are ever advertised publicly. They move through trusted recruiter relationships and establish professional networks, and by the time a position appears on a job board, the shortlist may already be in progress.

If you are making a career decision based only on what you can see, you are working with an incomplete picture. That is not a criticism. It is simply how the market operates, particularly at the mid- to senior level.

A specialist recruiter brings more than access to roles. They know which employers are planning to hire before those plans are public. They understand what the strongest packages look like right now, what the culture is like inside businesses you may be considering, and how to position your background in a way that resonates with the hiring decision-makers in your niche.

They will also be honest with you about timing. If the market conditions favour a particular move, or if there is a reason to wait, a good specialist recruiter will tell you that directly rather than simply pushing you toward a process.

The difference between a good career move and a great one often comes down to the quality of information and support behind the decision.

Your next chapter, on your terms

The stay-or-go decision is one of the most consequential choices a professional makes. Getting it right is not about moving quickly or holding on indefinitely.

It is about making a clear-eyed assessment of where you are, where you want to be, and what the most credible and well-supported path between those two points looks like in the current market.

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If you are at that crossroads now and want to understand what is genuinely available before committing, a conversation with a specialist recruiter is a sensible starting point.

Not because you need to move. Because you deserve to make that decision with the full picture in front of you, not just the part of it that is publicly visible.

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A little about Sarah Bishop and Recruit Recruit Ltd



Whether you're a sole trader hiring your first team member, a VC-backed startup needing to scale fast, or a corporate looking for top-tier C-suite talent, one thing stays true:

Your business grows when your people grow.

I help founders, CEOs and business leaders build brilliant teams through:

- **Recruitment:** finding and placing the right people for the right roles or embedding a talent team into growing businesses
- **Sales & Leadership Training:** developing high-performing teams that sell, lead and deliver
- **Speaking & EmCeeing:** energising events and conferences with insight, humour and practical takeaways
- **Coaching:** supporting leaders to grow confidently, communicate better, and build culture that sticks

Over the years, I've supported businesses at every stage, from bedroom startups to scale-ups and established firms navigating change. What they all have in common? A vision to grow and the ambition to get the right people on board to make it happen.

I bring no-nonsense advice, energy, empathy and results, whether I'm:

- Hiring a game-changing leadership role
- Training a founder-led team to sell with confidence
- Speaking on stage about team-building, fearless follow-up, or people strategy
- Coaching a business owner through their first ever hire

So, let's talk if:

- You're ready to grow and want to hire with confidence
- You need training or coaching to get more from your team (or yourself!)
- You're planning an event and want a speaker or EmCee who brings both energy and value

Drop me a message or connect - let's build something brilliant together.

Now - #1 Bestseller on Amazon -

Scale Up!: The Founders' Guide to Accelerating Growth by Building Dream Teams by Sarah Bishop

Contact

Sarah Bishop
Founder & CEO
Recruit Recruit Ltd

www.recruitrecruit.co.uk
sarah@recruitrecruit.co.uk
01902 763 006
07827 860358