



THE COMPROMISE TRAP

Should I Stay Or Should I Go?

There are times in any job when you have to ask yourself whether it's time to move on.... or if you need to stay, recommit, and perhaps renegotiate expectations and support. It may be you are offered an early retirement package. Or there is a new leader with a new strategy. Or you may just be feeling a bit root-bound and ready for a new challenge.

How do you make that decision? What criteria should you consider?

These simple questions were developed on the spot for a team who had 24 hours to decide whether to stay with their company during an ownership transition. Since then, they have proven useful to others facing similar choicepoints. Feel free to adapt them to suit your situation.

Part 1: Assessing

1. Are there values here I respect?

You might think in terms of you and the organization each having a mix of values. How much do they overlap? What are the values you respect? The points of common perspective and commitment? These don't have to be lofty or idealistic – they could be as practical as “zero-tolerance for red tape”.

2. Do I have influence here?

One person I know calls this listening for an invitation: Am I respected here? Does my voice carry enough weight that I can help the organization make the best decisions? If not, are there ways I could get the influence I would need to make a significant contribution?

3. Can I sustain myself here?

Given what I know about how things work around here, can I stay healthy and sane and meet my financial needs? What would I be compromising and what would the costs of that compromise be, for me and those I care about? Is it for a worthy enough cause?

Part 2: Planning

If there is a lot drawing you to stay as you reflect on the questions above, you may be able to “tip” the scales by thinking through how to renegotiate expectations and support with the organization and/or your boss.

4. What is the possibility I see?

What potential might I be aware of that isn't obvious to others? What convinces me that it is a really opportunity? See if you can paint a vivid picture in your mind.

5. How might my vision benefit them? How might it disrupt them?

How does the possibility I see connect to what they care about, spend their time on, worry about wish for? Keep in mind these may be obvious to you, but invisible to others. Take a little time to trace the cause and effect chain from your vision to their concerns and interests. It is also equally important to think through how it might be disruptive to them, raise complications or undermine a plan they've got under way. There is a saying in negotiations: If someone's behavior doesn't make sense, then you don't really understand their interests. Spend a little more time thinking through their perspective.

6. What offers might I make?

Now, knowing that what you see both benefits and disrupts, what might you offer? What proposals could you make that would amplify their ability to see the vision or address their concerns? To whom? Think in terms of something that is high leverage but incremental – not a religious conversion. See if you can connect to the shared values you identified in the first question above.

7. What do I need to request or renegotiate?

Finally, having taken a realistic look at the organization and whether you can sustain yourself there, what do you need? What might you need to say no to? This might be something you can no longer do or support, in order to be able to offer something better. How might you adjust expectations or get more support so you can sustain yourself and give them more of what they need? The idea here is to meet their needs as much as possible while honoring yours. If they cannot see their way to grant that, what is the best way for you to meet your needs, there or elsewhere?

How you act on these answers is up to you and must consider practical considerations such as your other job options. But once you are clear, you will be freer to re-engage and make a new commitment... or, if you determine this is not the place for you, you will be able to exit gracefully in a way that leaves you ready and able to engage fully in your next role.