When Writing the ‘I’m Moving On’ Post, Channel Kenny Rogers

Know when to fold ‘em, and avoid making the situation look like you’re waving the white flag.

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As the principal of a bustling PR agency, I’m used to dealing with human resources issues. Mostly they’re in-house at my company, but occasionally HR issues come up on the client side, and I’m called in to consult.

In many cases, these client-side HR issues revolve around new hires and high-level departures. Publicizing new hires or board members is, of course, the stock-in-trade of PR agencies, and we often write press releases and execute media-relations campaigns when a notable executive joins a client company. However, when a key executive departs — including the CMO — there is a need for communication around those departure events as well. Employees, customers and partners deserve to be informed about what is going on at the top levels of a company, and key stakeholders, including investors, should also be informed of personnel events that might be considered material.

I often find myself assisting my CMO clients with external communications when they depart one job for another. The most common vehicle for making a public announcement of such a departure is via a blog post, either on the company website or

through channels like Medium or LinkedIn, which give the poster complete, unedited control of the message. My personal belief is that departing CMOs should use such communications as a way to set themselves up for their "next adventure" in the corporate world. Even if the departure is contentious, the main goal for such announcements should be to remain positive and upbeat and avoid making the situation look like you're waving the white flag.

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When counseling CMOs in these circumstances, I encourage them to be gracious, kind and professional. Perhaps it goes without saying, but a good CMO departure post should never be bitter, petty or small-minded. This is not the vehicle or forum to settle scores or critique one's employer and their strategic, operational or financial shortcomings. Instead, departure posts should be complimentary when possible, thanking as many people as possible and being generous with praise when recapping both team and personal accomplishments.

This sort of post is also a good place to thank your enemies, because they may end up being your friends or colleagues later in your career. I encourage people to think about the maxim, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend," because it could happen someday! These communications are also an opportunity to give cover to people for successes not achieved or other challenges that have arisen during a CMO's tenure. In addition, the departing executive should talk about "lessons learned" that have been instructive to the team or the company overall.

Some HR professionals identify executive resignation letters as "letters of resignation and gratitude," and I believe that is a good definition of what they should be. A gracious departure note or post always positions the departing CMO (or any executive) favorably, and a key element of this communication is articulating that a successful transition of

roles and responsibilities is planned or underway. Positive and well-explained departure announcements, particularly when it comes to C-level executives, portray an organization in the best possible way and can build confidence and strengthen relationships with key stakeholders. And that should be the aim of any organization that is experiencing a top-level executive departure.

Departure letters or blog posts are also great opportunities for explaining the next steps in one's career and why they're moving in that direction. Portraying a new opportunity, building on past experiences or making personal changes can be illustrated or alluded to in varying degrees as appropriate, and they help the departing CMO provide color and depth to their departure. This also helps avoid perceptions of hard feelings or disagreement, despite what might be happening behind the scenes in the C-suite.

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Ultimately, a well-crafted departure letter or blog post sets the stage for a positive transition – not only for the CMO's own career, but also for the company and employees he or she is leaving behind.

So, yes, in the immortal words of Kenny Rogers, "You've got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away, and know when to run." And when it comes to walking away as a CMO, doing so gracefully is always your best bet.

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