

Ten signs you should quit your banking job in 2016

by Sarah Butcher 15 December 2015
with expert advice by **Karin Peeters** – Executive Coach



If you want to find a new job in banking, the early months of the year are, theoretically, the time to do it. Budgets are new, bonuses are about to be banked, and you're filled with renewed enthusiasm following the festive break.

Quitting a banking job isn't the same as it used to be, however. Firstly, it's become harder to find a new one – especially if you're a mediocre performer on a big base salary. Secondly, banks are doing their best to encourage anyone they want to keep to 'move internally.' And thirdly, it's harder than ever to generate a banking-style income outside the industry – irrespective of the spurious claims about [high pay in the fintech sector](#).

Even so, there are some situations in which you should almost certainly leave the job you're in. Recruiters and banking career specialists say these are as follows:

1. You've contributed a significant amount to your team and your bonus is tiny or non-existent

A zero bonus used to be an incontrovertible sign that it was time to quit. It still resonates badly: "It's a clear indication that you're at the bottom of the class," said Michael Karp, chief executive of Options Group. "The more consistently you get a zero, the harder it will be for you to move."

However, now that banking salaries are [hugely generous](#), a zero bonus isn't quite such a big deal. Nowadays, it's not so much about being paid nothing, but being paid unfairly.

“To leave because your bonus is small in this market, when no one's done well and most trading desks haven't performed, would be a stupid idea,” says David Reynolds at fixed income focused search firm Scott Reynolds Partners. “The real issue is when you've contributed a significant amount and haven't been paid commensurately with that.”

Zaheer Ebrahim at search firm Kennedy Group, agrees: “If you're not compensated for what you're producing and you're not compensated equally with your peers, you need to go.”

2. When the bank has indicated that it's not committed to your business area

If your current employer has publicly indicated that it will not be pursuing your line of business long term, you need to think about leaving. This is especially the case if your specialty happens to be the sort of capital intensive business that *all* banks are disavailing themselves of. – In this case, time is of the essence as the market is about to be flooded with people with your skillset.

[Long dated rates](#) are a key area for disengagement in 2016. So too is high risk securitized trading and – possibly – high yield.

Some banks *are* hiring. Mizuho has reiterated its [plans to expand its London fixed income trading business](#), for example, but the numbers aren't likely to be huge: five or six at most.

3. When the bank has hired someone else to do your job and moved you sideways into a new role created just for you

This happens a lot in banking, says Ebrahim. “Banks will quite often find someone whom they think is better equipped to do your job,” he says. “They know they can't make you redundant if you've been performing well, so they will move you sideways into an administrative COO position or create a new role for you.”

Last week, we reported that Citi moved senior M&A banker [Wes Walraven](#) to London from New York to cover EMEA industrials. As a result, Koen van Velsen, Citi's existing head of industrials was moved to work on automotive deals.

We're not saying that Van Velsen should leave – it's possible that he wanted to work on automotive deals in his home country. However, if this happens to you, be warned. “It's quite usual for them to get rid of you 12 to 18 months later,” says Ebrahim.

4. When you're training your lower cost replacement

Outsourcing to India is now [out of fashion in banking](#). However, banks are still pursuing a strategy of replacing existing senior staff with [cheaper juniors and mid-rankers](#).

“When you're training a lower cost version of yourself, your days are numbered,” says Tom Stoddart, director at Eximius Finance.

That said, it makes sense to stay if you're training a junior but are still able to add value through your wealth of contacts and experience. Brian Moynihan, CEO of Bank of America, made a presentation in September which showed that [senior staff in wealth management are 30% more productive than the rest.](#)

5. When there are no opportunities for you to progress

Graham Ward, a former head of European equities at Goldman Sachs who's now adjunct professor of leadership at INSEAD, says you need to think about swapping jobs when, "there are clearly going to be no opportunities for you to either learn or to move up."

Banking careers don't usually last long, says Ward: "It's later than you think. Do not torture yourself by staying around watching other people move forward."

6. When you can't ignore the nagging feeling that you're in the wrong role

Everyone has an off day, but when you spend every day feeling that you're in the wrong place, you probably are. "Do not ignore the conscious or unconscious nagging when you may feel that it is time for a change," says Ward. "Often that comes when you have been too long in the same position or too long at the same employer. Many employees hang on past their sell by date and get bored or cocky, leading to destructive relationships or behaviours."

Karin Peeters, a [coach who works with banking clients](#) in London, says the most pressing catalyst for a move is, "negative invasive thoughts about work." She's not talking about the occasional negative thought – she's talking about constant invasive thoughts: "When every switch off attempt fails and negative work stuff overtakes everything you once enjoyed."

As a corollary, Peeters says you should move on when: you stopped seeing any point in what you're doing long ago, the company's aims clash with your beliefs, and you "no longer recognize yourself."

"Life is too precious to waste living someone else's life," she concludes.

7. When your team is dysfunctional

Less existentially, Ward says you should move on when you're in a dysfunctional team: "That will lead to poor performance and you being negatively evaluated along with the team. Leave it behind and seek greener pastures. Team dysfunction is notoriously hard to fix."

8. When money is important to you and moving on is the only way you're ever going to get more

Headhunters also point out that in these days of diminished bonuses, salaries have become more important. Unfortunately, the only way of securing a salary increase is to gain a promotion and a bigger job title. However, with banks already top-heavy, internal promotions can be hard to come by. If you're languishing at VP level, moving externally for a bigger job title may be opportune, although equally as difficult.

9. When your performance review was a wake-up call that you don't want to listen to

If your annual review slammed your performance in a way that you think was unreasonable and unfair, you have two choices. “Either change the behaviour that is being asked of you, or, if you think is unreasonable, challenge it or leave,” says Ward.

10. When money is all that's left

Banking pays well, and this can be a trap in itself. “If you only stay out of fear of not being able to find something as well paid, you'll regret this when you're old,” says Peeters. “Be courageous, trust your resilience, there must be a way to experience abundance in a job you enjoy.”

Victor Macpherson, a [coach who works with bankers in their mid-30s who are exploring their options](#), says few of her clients, “genuinely spend time and effort thinking outside the box and outside the industry to make any genuine headway. They have a few exploratory chats and then say there isn't anything out there ... It isn't easy and takes time and soul searching. A lot are also scared of failure and trying something different ...”

May Busch, a former COO of Morgan Stanley Europe who now provides careers advice to finance professionals, says bankers who are thinking of moving out of the industry shouldn't rush things: “Don't make a sudden move, you start to put together a plan for experimenting with your options. It takes an average of two years to work your way into something else.”

Use your network, says Busch: “If you network your way into a new role, you may come across totally different ideas.” If you're moving out of banking, don't assume that the first job you move into is your ultimate destination. “It might take you one to three hops to get where you want to be. Don't pressurize yourself to find the perfect new job immediately.”