



# Undo (CMD + Z)

Thinking about declining an offer after accepting it is one of the most unfortunate situations you can find yourself in as a candidate. This lesson explains how to delicately extricate yourself from such situations without causing yourself reputational harm.

This is one of the most common questions that we have been asked in-person and on numerous online forums. Usually, the story plays out with the candidate interviewing at several companies in quick succession. The candidate receives an offer that is better than his current position but definitely not his top pick. The candidate wants to wait for the outcome of all the interviews but is either coerced into accepting the offer or voluntarily accepts it out of fear of the offer being rescinded.



A bird in hand is better than two in the bush. Eventually, the candidate gets an offer from his favorite company when he has already accepted an offer from his not so favorite company. A worse situation to be in is when the candidate receives an offer from his favorite company a few weeks into the new job.

Before we delve into how to deal with such a situation, companies with mature hiring processes usually give candidates ample time to make a decision on their offer. Large companies with pool-hiring are more tolerant as new-hires can be repurposed across teams. However, there may be instances where a hiring manager or a recruiter forces the candidate to make a hasty decision. It makes sense from their perspective because a

company can't have a pending offer out for months on end because headcounts need to be filled, quarterly budgets to be utilized, and projects to be kicked-off.



Ideally, our advice is to be upfront with the recruiter and ask for additional time to make a decision, but be cautious to not give the impression that you may be shopping around. Asking for a week's time is not frowned upon, two weeks is doable, but anymore than that raises eyebrows. The rationale is simple: if the candidate is hesitant to commit, the company making the offer is probably not his top choice, and the recruiter or the hiring manager may sense that the candidate will renege or leave the company if something more appealing comes along.

It is not uncommon in the valley to hear stories of employees who quit a month or two into the job only to join their dream company.

No matter how meticulously you plan your interviews, life happens, and more often than not, you will face a situation where you will receive an offer from the company you always wanted to work for right after you have already accepted an offer at a different one. In such a situation, the short and the right answer is to immediately let the recruiter or the hiring manager know that you will not be moving forward due to a change in your circumstances and that you will be pursuing another opportunity that more closely aligns with your interests. On face value, it may sound deceitful and outright wrong, but if you think about it, by joining a company half-heartedly, you end up doing injustice to not only the company but to yourself

too. You will live with regrets and not be able to contribute to your full potential at work. You want to be at a company where you feel motivated to do your best work.

One of the authors of this course faced a similar situation several years ago when he accepted an offer from Twitter, and within three days of it, a very strong offer from Cloudera, then a red-hot startup, came knocking on the door. The author's heart was set on Cloudera, and it took a lot of courage to write an email to the recruiter explaining the situation and walking back on the acceptance. The recruiter's reply was unsurprisingly unpleasant with veiled threats of future blacklisting; however, none of that ever materialized. The author went on to interview two more times at Twitter a few years later. If a company needs your skills, you will again find yourself in one of the interview rooms in its building. Good recruiters understand that eventually, we all must protect our self-interest. As a rule, try and plan really hard to not get yourself in such a situation, but if you do, then do not be shy to do what you think is right for you. If you find it hard to have a difficult conversation such as this over the phone, write an email, be upfront and polite. Here is an example email to look at:

Hey Alex, I have unfortunately landed in a very difficult position and I am afraid I will not not be able to join. Though I hold Google in the highest regard and see it as an absolutely amazing place to work, another opportunity has suddenly popped up that better aligns with my long term goals and ambitions. I wouldn't be doing justice to myself or to Google if I join half-heartedly and am unable to give my best at the job.

I apologize for any inconvenience my decision may cause and am much embarrassed myself but I must do what is right for me. It was a pleasure working with you and I hope you can excuse my gaffe.

The truly unfortunate situation to be in is when you have already started working at a company and then receive an offer from your dream company. Though it is not unheard of people to leave a company soon after joining, you will rub a lot of folks the wrong way if you do so. It will reflect poorly on your professional persona.

Personally, we will never accept an offer after already starting at a company and advise against it, but you are free to draw your own professional boundaries. If you absolutely must take up the new offer, then it may be ok to do so within the first few weeks of your joining, although with a lot of apologizing to your colleagues. Usually, new hires take at least two weeks and, in most cases, longer to become productive members of their teams. Paperwork, onboarding, mandatory training, orientation, etc., can eat up to two weeks of time. Any later than that and you run the risk of leaving an impression of a selfish, irresponsible and immature professional on your co-workers who witness your departure. These folks will be highly unlikely to recommend or hire you and will have grave apprehensions about working with you in future.

One such incident occurred when one of the authors worked at Cloudera. A very senior engineer was hired with great fanfare and quit right after three months with a flimsy excuse that the team's roadmap was well behind what he had imagined. He left a lot of people on the team bitter and sour since they had spent countless hours ramping him up on the existing state of the product and drawing out future plans. The departure was amicable, but needless to say, none of the people on that team would go out on a limb to hire or recommend him at their workplace in future. When confronted with such a situation, you may choose to wait out a year and then re-evaluate your situation. For instance, Google is known to let successful candidates join even after a year. If that is not possible, the other concession you can extract is to let you interview with fewer rounds in a year's time.

Last but not the least, if you are hell-bent on joining the other company and not doing so will result in extreme emotional anguish and severely affect your professional work, then you may just do it now rather than later. One of our friends resigned from Amazon Web Service three months after joining to be at his favorite Facebook, and the world did not end for him there.

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