

This industry is too small to burn bridges

 By [Khuthalani Khumalo](#)

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It happens to all of us - you get so frustrated in a position and you start to plot the day you will have the courage to tell everyone at work exactly what you think of them. The speech is planned and rehearsed; and like a theatrical performance, you're waiting for the last cue to prompt you into your monologue.

HOLD UP!

Before you go there - let me tell you a story. I have found that the bridges I didn't burn are the ones that I had lead to the fulfilment of my destiny.

Let me explain.

I once worked in a tough agency environment, where it was sink or swim for everyone - especially juniors. It was very hard, and I lasted only six months. During those months, I watched a few people burn some bridges as they chose to leave the organisation. They fought, stopped working as hard as they used to, and found every excuse to be generally difficult to everyone around them. And it always left me feeling uncomfortable, especially because that person performing the dramatic exit will always be the scapegoat if something turns up incomplete. ALWAYS!

I knew I wasn't happy, but I also knew that this kind of disrespectful behaviour was beneath me. So I made a decision that I would leave the company on my terms, and leave no reason for anyone to doubt my work ethic.



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As it turned out, the day I was to leave the company, a client had an event. It was an airline; Thai Airways was flying into South Africa for the very first time, after introducing the Johannesburg route, and the flight landed at OR Tambo at 6am or something like that (I kid you not). So, on my last day at work, I was at the airport at around 5am, ensuring that the red carpet was laid out; the flowers were ready for the first passengers off the plane; the South African welcoming committee (i.e., Zulu dancers and drummers) was in place for the photo opportunities; and that the media who wanted to cover this arrival had special access to move in those 'restricted access' areas of the airport.

Back at the office, my colleagues had bought a 'good-bye' cake for me, and I was so busy working, I didn't have a chance to have any. I came into the office after a long day of interviews and event logistics, literally to hand in my computer and bid by farewells. It was the longest day I had worked in the six months of being there. I left with my work ethic intact, and with a happy client and happy suppliers. I had succeeded in not burning my bridges.

Fast-forward several years, and as fate would have it, my CV landed back on the desk of this same agency. There were no awkward moments when I found out they wanted to interview me for a more senior position, given the experience I had acquired since I had left. And I didn't feel like I needed to justify my departure all those years ago. I accepted the position and started with them not long after that.

That decision I made in 2006 to make my exit a positive experience, paved the way for a phenomenal five years with the same agency, which changed the course of my career. Had I been dramatic in my exit - who knows where I would have ended up?

All I know is that choosing to end the working relationship in the manner that I started it, has benefited me greatly. I'm not saying you shouldn't leave your position if you are not happy. All I am saying is, you lose nothing by maintaining a professional demeanour right up until the very last day.

Think carefully about your exit strategy - you never know who you might cross paths with again in the future.

ABOUT KHUTHALANI KHUMALO

Khuthalani is a communications strategist, voice over artist, freelancer, proof reader, self-proclaimed CANVA-guru.

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