

Don't Go, Please Stay

By Tammy Flanagan

February 6, 2014

Last week's column, [To Stay or Not to Stay in Government](#), which featured my advice to a federal manager considering a jump to the private sector, hit a nerve with many readers. The benefits of a full career of federal employment and service came through loud and clear in the comments from readers of the column. In addition to the benefits that I pointed out, readers came up with additional reasons to look before you leap away from a career in federal service. There is something to be said about hearing these words of wisdom from those who have been there and are reaping the rewards of a federal career. Here's a summary of what they had to say.

Advantages of Government

Reasons commenters listed for sticking it out in federal service included:

The availability of a pension, in the form of the Federal Employees Retirement System basic benefit.

Flexibility.

Almost guaranteed pay increases in the form of step increases and possibly promotions, along with the potential for annual pay adjustments.

The Thrift Savings Plan, including future compounding, automatic contributions and government matching.

The fact that while it's easy to leave federal service, it's not necessarily easy to come back.

Job security that may not be what it once was, but is better than in the private sector.

The privilege of serving your fellow citizens and making a difference. In the public sector, your work often impacts the lives of people on a far grander scale than does private sector work.

Moving to a different career inside of the federal government retains your longevity and allows for a new location and a different work and environment without sacrificing your benefits.

Even in a major reduction in force, the government offers priority placement and some options for employees to remain employed.

Early retirement: The minimum retirement age for FERS is between 55 and 57 if you have 30 or more years of service.

Pitfalls of the Private Sector

Commenters also noted the following points to consider when exploring opportunities in the private sector:

Be realistic about your abilities and how they would transfer to the corporate world.

Corporate leaders and managers come and go and contracts don't last forever. There are very few lifetime careers out there.

Some private companies are all about the bottom line at the expense of salary, benefits and working conditions.

It's possible the work will be more satisfying, but the grass is not always as green as you hope.

Be sure to have a large emergency fund before you go, in case it doesn't work out.

A Word on Benefits

Some readers cautioned that the relative advantage of federal benefits could be erased over time by the country's political leaders. Here's what one wrote:

How likely is it that the federal benefits will remain? As you've seen in the last few years, federal pay and benefits have been on the chopping block every time a budget deal is made. I wouldn't count on Congress keeping the promises that have been made, and the only thing between your pension, sick leave, COLAs when you retire, and health benefits is a stroke of a pen.

My opinion on this is that Congress has a lot at stake if they make negative changes to federal employee benefits. It's one thing for a lawmaker from a state with a relatively small number of federal employees to propose changes in benefits. Actually passing them into law is a whole other story. That requires garnering the support of other legislators, many of whom represent large numbers of federal workers. Then there's the influence of lobbyists who are fighting to preserve and protect the valuable and earned benefits of federal employees and retirees.

Congress does seem to be laying the groundwork to change federal retirement benefits under the implementation of a new type of retirement coverage called FERS-Revised Annuity Employees, or FERS-RAE. This new designation covers employees hired in 2013 or later who are required to pay more into the Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund to pay for their future FERS basic retirement benefit. Will there be other changes in store for FERS or FERS-RAE employees? Time will tell.

For more information about how retirement laws actually get changed, tune in to "For Your Benefit" on Monday at 10 a.m. ET on [Federal News Radio](#), when Bob Leins of the National Institute of Transition Planning and I will co-host an interview with Ken Gold and Marian Currinder of the Government Affairs Institute at Georgetown University.

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