

The Jungle / Focus on Recruitment, Pay and Getting Ahead ♦ By Erin White

OVER THE SUMMER, Michele Houde faced a dilemma. The 35-year-old Atlanta executive enjoyed her marketing post at a big media company. Then a software company offered an intriguing job, with more responsibility and the chance to build her own staff. But the software company was smaller, and the offer didn't include a big raise. Ms. Houde wondered how to decide.

An improving job market means more opportunities to change jobs. It is a fortunate position to be in, of course, but it also makes for some tough decisions—whether you like your current job or not.

If you are happy, it is hard to tell whether another firm might be even better. And if you dislike your job, jumping too hastily might lead to something even worse. When there is no obvious lure such as a big promotion or significant raise, how do you decide whether to leave?

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job," says Jan Cannon, a career adviser and author in Boston. She recalls a client who was miserable in a market-research job, moved to another employer without adequately considering the reasons for her unhappiness, and was miserable again. She is now training to be a teacher. The problem, the woman now realizes, wasn't her former employer, it was working in market research, Ms. Cannon says.

Jacqui Barrett, a career coach in Overland Park, Kan., suggests eval-



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she says.

She took the job. After a few weeks in the post, it has more than met her expectations, she says.

New jobs don't always turn out well. In his eagerness to escape an unhappy job a few years ago, Christopher Jones, a 41-year-old sales executive, jumped to a new position too blindly, he says now, in hindsight. At the time, Mr. Jones was working at a big telecommunications company that was going through rough times. He didn't see much opportunity for growth in the industry. So when a job with a bigger title—vice president—at another big firm on a different side of the industry came along, he jumped.

But the new job put Mr. Jones in an operations post in the marketing department, overseeing a corporate alliance. For the first time in his career, he wasn't in sales. He realized that "what I really enjoy is leading sales organizations," he says. "When I took a step out of that to diversify my experience, what I found was that I really wasn't happy." What's more, the slower pace at his new employer created a cultural mismatch for Mr. Jones, who prefers a faster pace.

He began looking for another job. Armed with a better understanding of what motivates him, he looked for sales-leadership jobs at high-growth companies, and found one at a large tech firm. He even accepted a lower title and a slightly lower salary—although he hoped to come out ahead with bigger bonuses by hitting or exceeding sales targets.

Now, he has been at the tech company for five years and has been promoted to area sales manager. His job changes taught him the importance of evaluating a company culture before leaping. Before, he notes, "I didn't fully appreciate how much those things would mean to me."

firm. She thought it would just be a networking meeting; perhaps she could suggest people she knew for positions he had open. But the man was keen on landing Ms. Houde herself, and the talk turned into a form of job interview.

After the meeting, she researched the firm and the industry. She liked what she found. To help make a decision, she drew up a list of pros and cons, but found them roughly equal.

So she asked herself about her career priorities. What she really wanted, she realized, was a chance to shape something herself. She realized she could have more of an impact at the smaller firm, where she would head sales operations and online marketing. At the media firm, she had one direct report; at the software company, she would inherit a staff of four and get to hire four or five more. "It was the opportunity in terms of hiring, managing and building a team, and then looking back and saying that was my mark,"

uating whether your current job is advancing you toward longer-term goals. If a new job would put you on a clearer path, it is probably the better choice, even if you are content at your current post.

Ms. Houde liked her co-workers and her duties. She liked the cocktail-party value of working for an employer with a prestigious name. She considered it a good company to work for in general.

But she was worried about her prospects for advancement. She didn't see much potential for movement among the people one level above her. Plus, she had just gotten a new boss who didn't like to share strategy with her subordinates and didn't seem enthusiastic about grooming people for advancement, Ms. Houde says. "What's my opportunity here?" she asked herself.

She wasn't actively looking for another job. But she agreed to meet with a former boss's acquaintance who worked at a procurement-software