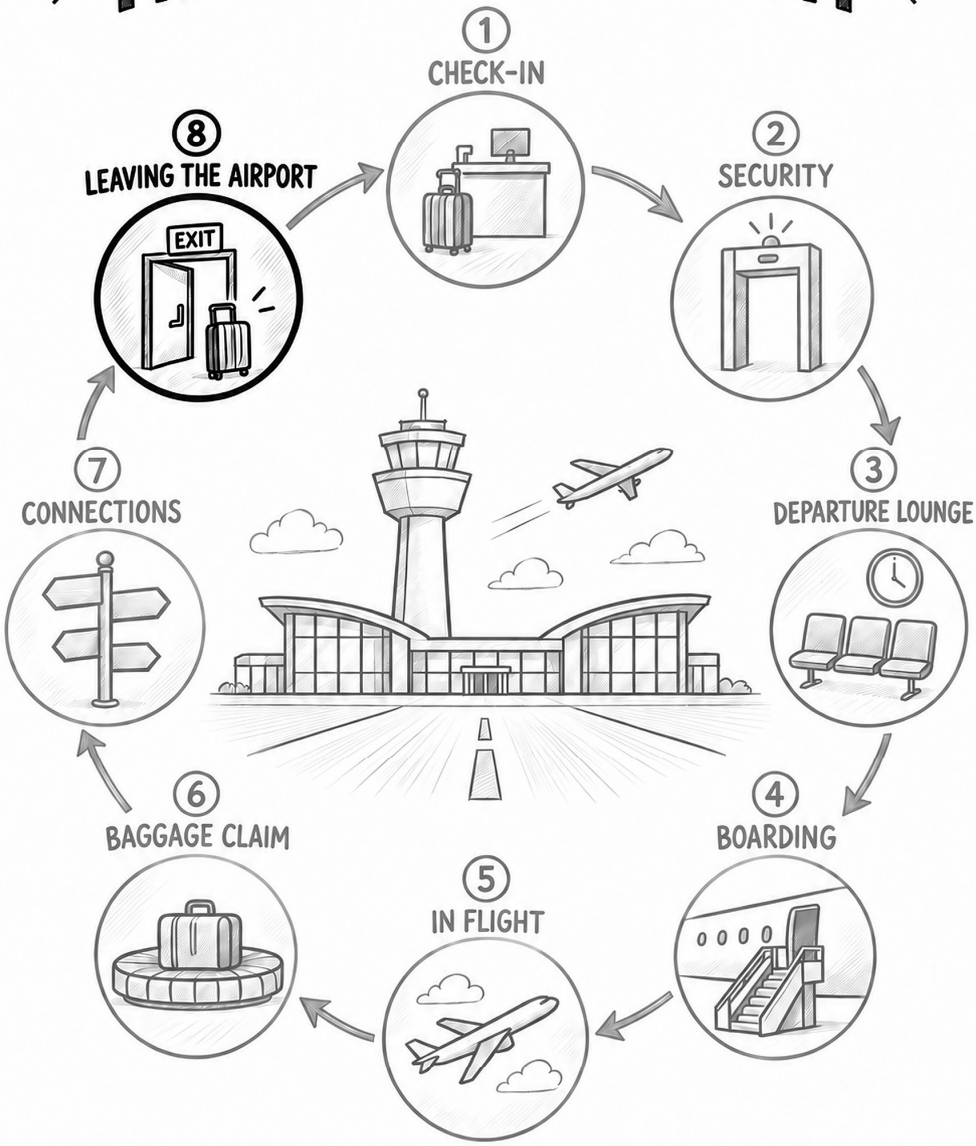
THE CAREER AIRPORT



My last day working in France should have been straightforward.

We were moving to the Netherlands two days later. I went into the office, recorded a video interview for the company intranet about my career and the value of international mobility, packed up my things and headed home feeling rather pleased with how neatly that chapter was ending.

I had arranged to keep my company car for the move. I would drive it to the Netherlands, use it until the replacement arrived and return it afterward.

That was the plan.

I got into the car, turned up the music and drove away. About five minutes later, I reached a set of traffic lights I had passed almost every working day for two years.

The sequence had changed.

I had not.

I drove straight into the back of a stationary car.

The impact wrote off my car. Fortunately, nobody was hurt, including the other driver. I apologised repeatedly while trying to process how a video interview about successful international mobility had been followed almost immediately by the least graceful departure imaginable.

While I waited for the recovery truck, two more accidents happened at the same lights for exactly the same reason. That did not remove my responsibility for the collision. It did suggest that the changed sequence was contributing more than I had first imagined.

A recovery truck took the car to a garage. The garage provided a courtesy car, although "courtesy" was doing considerable work. It was tiny, and when I later read the small print, I discovered it was not allowed to leave France.

That was inconvenient, because leaving France was the one thing I needed it to do.

I explained the situation at work. They kindly arranged another car, and the move went ahead on schedule.

It was not the elegant final scene I might have chosen.

But that is how endings often work.

We imagine that a career chapter will conclude with a polished speech, a thoughtful farewell and a clear sense of what happens next. In reality, the last weeks of a role can include unfinished work, mixed emotions, awkward conversations and the professional equivalent of driving into a car five minutes after recording a video about how well everything is going.

Leaving the Airport is not about engineering a perfect exit.

It is about recognising what the journey gave you, deciding what deserves to travel onward and refusing to drag every grievance, identity or expectation into the next stage.

Sometimes the next destination is already on your boarding pass.

Sometimes it is not.

Either way, the way you finish one journey shapes the person who begins the next.

LEAVING THE AIRPORT OBSERVATION 1

Leave People with a Good Last Memory

People may forget the details of your departure, but they remember how you made them feel while it happened.



Early in my career, I handed in my notice to leave a small company.

When the founder heard, he punched me on the arm.

It was intended as an affectionate gesture. The message was roughly, "I like you, and I am sorry to see you go." The force suggested that his communication strategy might have benefited from a second draft.

I understood what he meant. I also remember the punch more clearly than any formal part of the leaving process.

Departures compress emotion.

The person leaving may feel relief, uncertainty, excitement, guilt or disappointment. The people remaining may feel pleased for them, worried about the extra work, rejected, envious or genuinely sad. A conversation that would normally be routine can suddenly carry more meaning than either person intended.

That is why the final days matter.

The last impression is unusually sticky

During a long period in a role, people see hundreds of versions of you. They see good days, difficult meetings, successful projects, mistakes and ordinary Tuesdays.

At the end, attention sharpens.

Colleagues notice whether you continue doing the work properly or mentally leave three weeks before your access card stops working. They notice whether you help the person taking over, thank the people who supported you and speak respectfully about those who are not in the room.

They also notice whether every farewell conversation becomes an opportunity to explain what was wrong with the organisation.

You do not need to pretend that everything was perfect. A false celebration helps nobody. But there is a difference between honest reflection and using your departure as a final attempt to win every argument you had while employed.

The second rarely changes the organisation.

It does change the memory people keep of you.

Leave useful work behind

A good handover is not merely a document containing forty links and the phrase "self-explanatory."

It helps another person understand what matters, what can wait and where the risks are. It names the relationships that require care, explains the judgement behind recurring decisions and gives people a realistic route into the work.

The standard is simple. Do not create avoidable confusion for the people who inherit your responsibilities.

Four actions usually matter:

1. **Finish what can reasonably be finished.** Do not create artificial heroics, but close the work that only needs a final push.
2. **Make the hidden work visible.** Record the routines, relationships and decisions that are obvious only because you have been doing them for years.
3. **Thank people specifically.** General praise is pleasant. Naming what someone did and why it mattered is memorable.
4. **Protect dignity.** Your departure is not permission to expose private conversations or settle old scores.

Leaving well does not mean leaving without emotion.

It means ensuring that your emotion does not become somebody else's unnecessary damage.

FINAL CALL

Your final days cannot rewrite an entire career, but they can become the part people remember most clearly. Leave them with evidence of your judgement, gratitude and care.