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TOP 10 TIPS FOR SALARY NEGOTIATIONS

Learn how to get the salary you deserve

By Alan Kearns

It is the night before your final interview for your dream job. Despite your excitement about landing that ideal position, you are apprehensive because you know it's time to talk about that dreaded topic—salary expectations.

Many people struggle when trying to obtain a salary they deserve and one that accommodates their lifestyle. They worry about appearing unreasonable and greedy or, worse, they don't want to lose the job to someone who is more "affordable." They often forget that for the employer, yours is only one of many negotiations for services and products they depend on. Most employers see it as a matter of professional debate—so should you.

In our competitive economy, savvy negotiating skills are often prized. This will be your first opportunity to show you can take and hold a well-informed position in a professional environment. Here are 10 tips for strong salary negotiations:

1. Don't name a figure until the employer has made it clear that you're the choice candidate. Interviews are your only real opportunity to demonstrate your value to the employer. Having a salary discussion too early can distract both you and the employer from learning more about each other. If the employer presses, see Tip #2.

2. Avoid mentioning a figure first. If the discussion is going towards salary, try to get the employer to mention a figure first. If presented with: "What salary do you expect?" A good response is: "You likely have a figure in mind that fits the responsibilities and requirements of the job. I would be interested in knowing what that figure is."

adapted from Toronto Catholic District School Board. (2013). English for financial literacy, volume 3 (CLB 6 - 8). http://wiki.secteuretablissement.org/uploads/English_for_Financial_Literacy_Volume_3.pdf ■

If you're not yet sure that you'll be offered the job and the employer asks for a figure, try to delay an answer by using one of these tactics:

• If the employer seems agreeable, reply with: "I would like to wait until you're sure I am the best candidate for this position. Until then I think a discussion of salary is premature." This usually works.

• If the employer persists, offer a narrow salary range you'd be comfortable with (see Tip #3).

• Finally, if the employer really wants a specific number, recognize you are making a very real commitment to that number and you had better be sure you can live with that salary (see Tip #4).

3. Do your research. Try to find out what people in your field, and in that particular organization, earn. Resources could include current employees, online salary calculators, the websites and directories of professional associations, government reports and business and industry-specific trade magazines. If you can afford to, you can also hire a salary expert.

4. Know your bottom line. What is the minimum salary you would accept? Before investing too much time and energy on landing the job, figure out if your needs won't be met by the salary offered.

5. Don't forget the benefits. The negotiation isn't finished until you have discussed fringe benefits (holidays, insurance, pension). These "job perks" can add the equivalent of 15 to 28 percent to your salary. Before discussing benefits, you should figure out what you need in medical, dental, and vision plans, sick leave, holidays and vacations. As well, you should discuss the company's policy on acquiring future raises. Finally, you should get all of these details summarized in writing as a letter of agreement or an employment contract. Make sure to take personal notes and document the results of your negotiations to check against the final contract.

6. Back up your "reasons." As I mentioned above, this is an opportunity to show you can carry your weight in a negotiation. Part of that includes justifying your position based on the evidence you've been able to gather about the salary you should receive. As well, demonstrate your value by using your résumé to point out quantified benefits you brought to previous employers.

7. Be willing to walk away. It's easy to convince yourself that there is only one "dream job." The truth is that many of the most desirable aspects of work (great colleagues, flexible hours, interesting work environment) can be found within a broad range of opportunities. If you feel pressure to accept conditions you won't want to live with in the future, it's perfectly fine to withdraw from the interview process.

8. Don't revisit agreed upon points. Again, this is a chance to prove you're a strong negotiator. Revisiting points you've agreed to suggests you aren't able to keep to your word. If the employer insists on revisiting points she's agreed to, it suggests her negotiation has been less than sincere.

9. Use your instincts. Interviews take place on many levels. Questions can be complicated and have multiple intentions. Astute interviewers will observe body language and tone of voice as well as the answers you give. When deep in the complexities of the final negotiation, trust your instincts (and your research).

10. Don't rush! At the end of the negotiation you may feel pressured to commit. Take a day to consider your options and make a decision you're comfortable with.

Having to negotiate is difficult. For many, simply recognizing the nature of the discussion is helpful. Recognize that this is an opportunity for you to showcase your value to the company. Also, accept the fact that the employer has the incentive to hire you for as low a salary as possible and will seek justification for every dollar you are seeking.

When put in perspective, the negotiation is a great opportunity for you to show that you can remain professional and clear-minded in a high stakes environment. Plus, if you're successful, your pre-negotiation preparation could be the best investment you will ever make. So use these negotiation techniques and get the salary you really deserve.

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