

Negotiating an Offer

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Although the job market is improving and the number of openings is increasing, obtaining a job offer is not getting any easier. Many companies are requiring candidates to go through lengthy and elaborate interviews before extending them an offer. This year we have coached our candidates through interviews that include developing business cases, providing writing samples, meeting with panels of executives, personality profiles and assessment testing.

The days of having a single interview and getting offered a job are for the most part long gone. There is a lot of time, energy and preparation that is invested by both the candidate and the company prior to a job offer being extended. For this reason it is more important than ever to understand the end game. Influencing the company you are interviewing with to craft an offer that meets your requirements begins from the time you fill out an application and have your first interview and ends when you've signed the offer letter.

As a seasoned executive recruiter I have a tremendous amount of experience managing the multitude of variables that take place during the selection and interview process. Sometimes the most unpredictable variable is the candidate themselves. No matter how much hand holding and coaching I do, it is ultimately up to the candidate to provide the prospective employer with the desire and comfort necessary to secure the offer.

This can be a long and sometimes frustrating process but the candidate has to stand or fall on their ability to convey the right message to the employer. One of the most important components of this message is your desired compensation.

The Do's and Don'ts of Salary Negotiation

First of all, before you even go on your first interview, take the time to document your current salary and benefits. Writing down all of the components before hand will make it easier for you to articulate your current compensation package and will enable you to formulate an idea of a desired compensation for your next position. Gather the required documentation to substantiate these numbers as you will either be asked to produce the documentation prior to an offer being extended or an offer will be made contingent upon an outside party verifying its accuracy. Once you have been contacted about a career opportunity understand the salary range of the position before accepting an interview. Although you may not be provided with an exact dollar amount, the internal or external recruiter, as well as the hiring manager, are all aware of the potential range that an offer will be extended at. If this range is well below your expectations, do not go on the interview.

Early in most interview processes you are asked to fill out an application. Be specific and accurate about all aspects of the form especially your compensation. Detail each component of your compensation separately. In other words list your base, bonus, commissions, options, stock grants and any other incentives. In the box provided for desired salary write the

word negotiable. It is best to have a discussion about this number rather than list it.

If you are working with an executive recruiter provide her with the documentation regarding your current compensation and salary history. It is extremely important to be honest and open about your compensation expectations early on in the process. If you have picked a competent recruiter, she will be your greatest ally in negotiating your offer.

Aside from your honesty the most important concept to grasp is to be realistic regarding your expectations. So what does it mean to be realistic?

To be blunt it means checking your ego at the door. I have seen many opportunities lost in the last stages of an offer because a candidate had an especially high opinion of himself and an inflated sense of his worth to another organization. I am always amazed by the candidates who insist on demanding salaries well beyond the norm because they believe they're worth it. Although companies may pay a premium for exceptional talent, it is highly unlikely that they will totally whack their guidelines and upset your potential peers by bringing you on board well beyond the salary range. Remember to who much is given, much is expected. So by demanding and getting a higher salary, you have raised the bar of expectation higher on your capabilities to produce results. So be careful what you wish for.

In order for you to be realistic it is also necessary for you to understand the components of what the potential employer has to offer as well. In other words, understand what their compensation plan entails. Perform your due diligence regarding their earnings history, pay outs of bonuses and the frequency of your performance reviews as well as what your increases/bonuses are based on. Don't make unreasonable requests that would require them to do something extraordinary for you, like create a new compensation or incentive program. Don't expect them to guarantee things in writing in an offer letter that is against firm policy. That could mean the dollar amount of a bonus, the processing of a green card, or potential incentive compensation. If their general counsel or human resource policies preclude certain information to be detailed in an offer letter, no matter how much you would like it to be in writing, you better get comfortable with the fact that it's not going to happen.

There are certain things that are not negotiable and they vary from company to company.

Finally realize that an offer will most likely be extended as a result of not only your successful interviews but the partnership that you have created between the hiring manager, the human resources department and the recruiter. No matter how strong a candidate you are there is a tremendous amount of work that goes on behind the scenes to get an offer extended to you. Be up front and honest with your feedback during the entire process and don't save any surprises for the end. As issues arise bring them to light during the process.

Everyone will respect you and be willing to work with you if you are straight forward and sincere. Not only will they feel frustrated and resentful if you bring significant issues up late in the process, it will negatively reflect on your professionalism and be considered an indication

of your potential future behavior.

In closing, once you have decided to accept an offer, express your enthusiasm directly to the hiring manager and thank the folks that have assisted you in the process. If you decide not to accept an offer, personally speak with the hiring manager and thank him or her for the opportunity. Declining an offer by email is like breaking up with someone over the phone. It is considered cowardly, unprofessional and reflects a disregard for all of the effort that went into the process. Remember that the way you handle turning the job down will largely determine whether you will be considered for future opportunities. Considering how incestuous of a community information security is, chances are very strong that you will encounter this manager/recruiter/human resource contact, again at another company or you will encounter someone that he or she knows during future interviews. Never burn a bridge. Your professionalism or lack there of will follow you on all of your interviews.

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