

The Odyssey Of The Salary Offer

By Randy Block

You've made it through several rounds of interviews. You have been notified that the company has made their choice. Congratulations! You have been chosen.

Now it's time to negotiate an offer that will make you feel good about working for the new company.

You will be in good shape if you made the right moves from the beginning of **The Odyssey Of The Salary Offer**.

The Screening Process

Much of the groundwork is laid here. There are several websites such as salary.com, which can be helpful in determining compensation for the position.

As a candidate (especially if you are unemployed), it is very important to defer talking about compensation until the entire screening process is completed. It's been my observation that those companies insisting that you give a salary history and a salary desired on the front end are shopping on price as a major qualification. My advice here is asking yourself: "Is this the kind of company you want to work for?" If you specify a salary desired, the chances are over 65% that you will be wrong (too high or too low).

One caveat... Most government and other non-profit groups such as public schools etc. do not "negotiate" as outlined above. Instead, they adhere to strict compensation guidelines.

Know Yourself

Understanding your career values, what you love to do and the definition of your value proposition are imperative. Without a clear awareness of these, decision-making is very difficult. Clearly, a critical part of the preparation is to discern whether the position you are applying for is a really good fit:

1. It has to benefit your career and the goals you have set.
2. You must believe in the company, products and markets.
3. You be *genuinely* excited about becoming part of the team!

The Initial Screen and The Compensation Question

Whether initial screening is by telephone or in person, when asked about salary history and a salary desired:

1. Even *before* this question is asked, turn the tables early in the screening and ask *them* what the salary range is for the position they are trying to fill. Most will answer the question before they ask you.
2. State: I will be happy to have a discussion of compensation after we have completed the screening process. If it is a good fit for both of us, I am confident we can reach a mutual agreement.
3. If they continue to press, give them a number. You can prepare for this by adding up your “bare bones” living expenses. You will come up with a number (monthly or annually—don’t forget taxes). Your response then would be: “The minimum offer I would *consider* would be \$_____.” Note that you said, “consider” not accept. This leaves the door wide open. Let’s face it; if they are going to make you an offer below your minimum, then you can then reject them!

During and after the interview process, these responses can help you deflect the compensation question, should anyone ask.

NOTE: When you are working through a third party such as an independent recruiter, it is very important that you share compensation information. They want to make a placement and they need as much information as they can get to help put the transaction together.

When The Offer Is Made

Now is the time to hear what they have in mind. You receive the call.

Some suggestions:

1. Listen carefully
2. Ask good questions for clarification
3. Thank them graciously (even it’s high or low)
4. Never accept or reject their verbal offer
5. Always ask for the offer in writing (even if it is from your best friend!)

You typically have five working days to get back to them after you have received a written offer. This will give you a chance to contact other firms that you are *interviewing*. Tell the other companies that you have a written offer but refrain from any details.

Be wary if the company making the offer wants an answer immediately. This could be a sign of desperation on their part.

If you are 100% delighted with the offer, then accept it and give a reasonable starting date.

If you are unhappy with the offer, there are definite steps to explore with the company. Keep in mind that a job must be a good fit for you, as well as for them.

Find Out The Adjustment Possibilities

Tell the hiring manager or HR person that you are really excited about coming on board. However, you need a little help (most companies want the person to “feel good” about coming to work).

CareerBuilder.com's survey of 875 hiring managers disclosed that about 60% leave room in the first offer for negotiations, 30% say their first offer is final, and 10% say it depends on the candidate. And, four out of five corporate recruiters said they are willing to negotiate compensation, according to a study conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management.

It's important that you want to know about their flexibility.

Ask them:

1. Is there any “wobble room” on the base salary?
2. Do they offer signing bonuses (if so, what is the range for this position)?
3. Can they give an early performance review?
4. Is stock available?
5. Can they increase the profit sharing?
6. Are they able to offer more vacation days and other perks?

Remember, you are only asking them if they can help you in the ways in which you will be helping them consummate the agreement. Most will give you data.

The Counter-Offer

The most important concept to remember about a counter offer is that it negates their original offer. Put another way, they are under no obligation to reinstate the offer they made initially.

After you have collected data and have a pretty good idea of what they can do, contact them. You simply say: “These are the terms of an offer I will accept” and give them your terms. Your willingness to “walk away” from the original offer gives you a very strong negotiating position.

The risk should be balanced on both sides. You have to live with the agreement. It's your career. You are in charge.

Randy brings expertise in executive search as a certified career coach. He has guided all levels of professionals in the areas of career transition: changing careers, choosing a career direction, evaluating/negotiating offers, executive career marketing, finding jobs, getting organized, as well as finding opportunities for self-employment, freelancing and consulting. He holds an **IJCTC** certificate from the Career Planning and Adult Development, a **CCMC** (Certified Career Management Coach) from Career Coach Academy, a **PCRC** (Professional Certified Retirement Coach) from the Retirement Coach Institute and certified coach for **Now What? Life Blueprint™ Training**.

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