



Negotiating Your Career

Would you turn down an extra \$5-10,000 per year in salary? If your boss offered you an all-expense paid company car or the chance to attend convention at company cost, would you refuse to accept it? Probably not. You would probably be thrilled to receive these perks. But do you have the courage to **ask** your employer for these benefits?

There are a number of reasons why it is beneficial to learn negotiation strategies when it comes to advancing your career.

The first (and most obvious) benefit is financial. If, on your first job, you negotiate a starting salary of \$30,000 versus \$25,000, that initial dollar amount will be the base your future salary history is built upon. Most raises and job offers (and 401k deposits/matches) are based upon a percentage of salary. Every monetary increase becomes exponentially more significant over the

40 plus years of your career.

One of the most common perks to negotiate is training opportunities. Better negotiation skills result in enhanced professional development, and those improved skills and professional development lead to additional negotiations in future performance reviews and job offers to justify higher than average salary increases.

Money and training are not the only reasons to develop your negotiation skills though. Your self-confidence will increase every time you successfully negotiate an issue. You'll be demonstrating this quality to your boss just by virtue of engaging in the negotiation process and you'll be reinforcing to the company that you value your skills and you expect them to value your skills, all of which enhances your credibility.

So with all these benefits, why don't people negotiate? The number one reason: **fear**. Most people are secretly afraid

the company will rescind the job offer if they are too demanding. Some would say women in particular don't negotiate for fear of being labeled greedy or having people not like them.

People often are ignorant about what they **can** negotiate in a job offer. They assume the company is making them the best possible offer or looking out for them. In reality, every individual is responsible for their own career path and ultimate success. While your company may indeed be looking out for you, that doesn't relieve you of your responsibility of taking care of yourself.

So where do you start?

You need to be aware of the factors going into a job offer:

- **Market.** Is it an employer's market or a job seeker's market? Is there an excess of qualified candidates with similar skills? Are there a lot of new employers in the area increasing the demand for quality candidates?



Your Career

by Marie Herman CIWD, ATM-B

- **Geography.** Rural Indiana is not likely to pay the same wages as downtown Manhattan.
- **Company.** Every company has their own internal pay scale and unique benefits and personal rules. The company may pride itself on paying its employees top dollar or they may be experiencing economic challenges.
- **Position Title.** An executive assistant generally makes more money than an administrative assistant who makes more money than a receptionist.
- **Existing Salary Range.** Certain positions may be locked into certain salary ranges, especially public positions such as government, school districts or union shops, for example. There may be no flexibility within that organization to move outside those ranges.
- **Company / Executive's Need** Just

how badly does the company/boss need to fill this position? Just how much does the company/boss want **you** to fill this position? How much authority does this individual have in the hiring process?

- **Competition.** How "replaceable" are you? The more specialized your skills and the greater inside knowledge of the company/industry/position you have, the better leverage you have in the negotiation process.
- **You.** Your skills, experience, education, certifications, salary history and myriad other "unique to you" factors go into the salary offer they make you. This is why two individuals working in the same position performing the same tasks may end up at different starting salaries— one may have additional years of experience or a degree or simply better negotiating skills and a better ability to "sell" themselves to the company.

Let the company be the first to suggest a salary. If asked what your salary requirements are, try to avoid a single number. Instead provide a range and indicate it is flexible depending on the opportunities and benefits offered by the position. You don't have to accept their first offer. It is perfectly reasonable to say, "Thank you for offering me the position. I am so excited about working for XYZ Company. However, I'd like to take the weekend to review the terms. Can I let you know on Monday?" If it is less than they had indicated they were offering or substantially less than you were anticipating, it is reasonable to say, "I am a little disappointed in this salary. Is there any flexibility in that?"

Make sure a review timeline is indicated in your offer letter (and yes, you should be receiving an offer letter, so all details you negotiate are spelled out in writing and thus more enforceable in court if necessary). By spelling



out that you get a review at a certain predetermined time, you may be willing to start with a lower salary, as long as the salary will be reviewed and modified with acceptable performance at a future date. This is a very tricky area, since some companies don't honor that commitment—your position of power is during the job offer process, not at review time!

Request full information on their insurance (including the cost of premiums), vacation/sick policy, tuition reimbursement policy, explanation of any other benefits they offer, etc. You need as much information as you can possibly get in order to make an educated decision or come up with a reasonable counter offer. In addition, if you are offered a position with more than one company, you want to be sure you are doing an apples and apples comparison of their packages. There is much more to a position than simple salary dollars. For example, a university might offer a lower salary, but they may offer the benefit of free tuition for their classes. If you were planning to return to school, this benefit might make the lower salary worthwhile as it would be equivalent to several thousand dollars.

When you make a counteroffer, start with deal breakers. If your family circumstances require you to leave work at 3 p.m. every day no matter what, then this is the issue you begin negotiations on. Don't waste your or their time discussing other issues that aren't actu-

ally deal breakers for you. It's important that you identify what your deal breakers are. If a 60+ minute commute is a deal breaker for you, it would be ridiculous to apply for jobs located 1.5 hours away (unless your first negotiation issue was the option of telecommuting).

Don't issue ultimatums. This process is a give and take, not a dictatorship. Ultimatums are a lose/lose proposition. They make you look demanding and the employer resents feeling backed into a corner. Try to leave your requests open-ended rather than implying "take it or leave it," especially if the item you are negotiating is a "nice to have it," but not a deal breaker. You need to be prepared to walk away on the deal breakers, but you certainly don't want to walk away on a minor issue that doesn't really matter to you, just because your pride won't let you back down.

Your negotiation will be most successful when you negotiate from a position of power. Research your facts prior to entering negotiation. Check salary calculators on the internet, review brochures from local staffing services, check with the library on the going salaries for local employers and generally do as much as you can to become fully informed on what is considered average. Investigate the factors behind the average salary as well—how many years of experience, how high of a degree, was the average employee certified, etc. Every area you exceed is an area to enhance your negotiation position. Your

ability to sell yourself during the interview or performance review will make an enormous difference in the results.

What are the areas you are actually able to negotiate? The first one most people think of is money. But money is more than just your salary. Potential areas to explore would be a sign-on bonus (for instance, the healthcare industry, in many areas is paying sign-on bonuses due to the shortage of employees). Performance bonuses is another area. Although they have fallen somewhat out of favor since the stock bubble burst in the early 2000s, stock options are another area where there may be room for negotiation (stock options allow you to purchase stock in the future at a set dollar amount, regardless of what price the stock is trading at on a certain date). You may be able to negotiate a severance package, either when you are hired (especially if you are going into a risky situation like a startup company) or when a company is going through mergers and laying off employees. Retention bonuses are something you can discuss with your employer (they pay you to agree to work until a certain date).

Additional options you can look at for negotiation include benefits. Will the company pay a larger share of your insurance? If you are not eligible to get insurance until 90 days after hire, will they pay your COBRA benefits during the interim? Any benefit might be fair game for you, though many companies will not have flexibility in this area as they wish



to remain consistent with all employees.

Vacation time is a common area for negotiation. You can ask for time to accrue faster than the ordinary time accrued or you could ask them to waive a delay in accrual time (i.e. if you don't start to accrue vacation until after you have been there six months, that could be an area for negotiation).

Training and professional development are prime areas to negotiate. You can request that the company provide dollars in the training budget for your development. Since you will have done your research in advance on what seminars you might like to attend, you will already know the correct dollar amount to request as well as an approximation of travel costs that might be incurred. You could also request the ability to attend a seminar with professional development time used instead of vacation time.

Other types of benefits that could potentially be negotiated (depending on a number of factors— your bravery in asking for them, the geographic area, the specific company, your level within the company, your ability to justify the need for your position, etc.) would be tuition reimbursement, a company car, cell phone coverage, home internet access, housekeeper (if you'll have a home office), relocation expenses, health club membership, commuting allowance, parking, flex time, IAAP membership and convention attendance and reduced workweek hours. Certainly if you ask for everything you

will look (and be) greedy, but selecting a few of the most important ones is worth pursuing.

Be prepared to justify special requests. For instance, you can show that by allowing employees to have flex time, the department would be covered for longer hours. If you work 7-4 and your coworker works 9-6 and you each cover the other's desk when one is not there, the department gets coverage from 7 a.m. - 6 p.m. with the core hours covered by two people. The employees are happier because they are missing the worst of the morning commute or able to accommodate their child's school schedule. Everyone wins with that proposal. Highlight ways your request will save the company time and/or money.

Justify your request based on your own merits or independent third party observations. Do **not** compare yourself to other individuals. Discuss what the position is worth based on the responsibilities or what your skills are worth and why your unique experience qualifies you for more money. Don't talk about how much money you need. It is not the company's responsibility to make sure you are getting enough money to cover your expensive car payment every month.

A final factor to consider in your negotiation is if a company refuses something critically important to you and beneficial to your long term professional development, such as the ability

to attend seminars: do you really want to work for that company? Sometimes the areas a company will negotiate on are hampered by their desire to treat all employees equally. However, other times, their lack of desire to negotiate with you demonstrates how they treat and support their employees and it should serve as a red flag to you. Only you know if you can be happy at a company that refuses to provide professional development support for its employees.

The key elements to your success in negotiating are to know your market value, keep your skills cutting edge, and project a professional polished confident image. Negotiate with the decision maker and bring the right attitude of wanting to come up with a mutually agreeable solution, rather than wanting to get everything your way. Keep in mind this is a business transaction, not a popularity contest. Their refusal to negotiate on certain points is not necessarily a reflection of what they think of you or your skills. Whatever you negotiate, get it in writing to protect yourself,

About the author:

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