



# Get Your Fair Shake in a Shaky Market

## How to Negotiate a Sound Job Offer in an Environment of Tight Budgets & Limited Opportunities

*... be ready to demonstrate to the employer why your professional salary range is higher than the offer, based on the market research you've completed and the professional experience you have. The more prepared and thought out your position is in advance, the more comfortable, confident and persuasive you will be during the negotiation.*

With every job offer, there comes a time to negotiate. A time when office desks become the proverbial bargaining table and your prospective employer has shown its cards—a glimpse at the salary, vacation and benefits package. Now it's your turn to shrewdly analyze the deal and look for opportunities and deficiencies.

Even in today's cautious employment market, where job offers are few and far between, you have room to bargain for a better deal. The guarded approach employers are taking in selecting new hires is evidence that you and your qualifications have been thoroughly vetted. Often operating on limited hiring budgets and managing understaffed teams, employers know how valuable the right addition to the workplace can be. They are willing to bargain to get the best hire on board. If you are going to commit your time and talents to one organization, make sure the terms work for you by taking a reasonable and systematic approach to negotiating your job offer.

### Get Grounded

While it may seem like job offer negotiations are an opportunity to “think big,” the smartest bargaining asset you have is reason. If you ask for too much, whether that's in terms of perks, compensation or benefits, you could be setting your performance expectations much higher than you can achieve. Instead of thinking big, think rationally. Start by determining the amount of bargaining leverage you have using the following three factors:

**Employability** – Depending on your skill set and industry, your demand as a professional can vary widely. For example, with a shortage of medical support talent on the market, nurses are in high demand, giving them an edge at the bargaining table. Before you approach the negotiation phase, assess the level of demand for your skills (an approximation of the number of jobs available compared to the number of qualified candidates in the marketplace). It will help you establish your negotiation footing, knowing how valuable your skills are in the marketplace and how likely it is the employer has a list of equally qualified candidates.

**Employment Status** – Are you currently employed or re-entering the workforce? Have you been out of work and on the job hunt for a while? Your personal job situation will affect how little or how much you want to negotiate. Candidates who are employed when they receive a job offer have a strong bargaining chip—a stable employer. Unemployed workers looking to secure a job more quickly have less room to maneuver.

**Employer Need** – Consider how long the employer has been working to fill the job. Do you know if there is an urgent need? Do you have skills or experience many other candidates are unlikely to have? Explore whether or not the employer's hiring needs give you a negotiation advantage.

With a strong understanding of the leverage afforded by your demand in the market, your personal employment status and the employer's need to hire, you will approach the negotiating process with a clear understanding of where bargaining boundaries lie.

## Name Your Terms

You want to go into the negotiation process with facts and figures on your side. Gather specific salary information based on the job for which you are applying and the region you are in. Be sure to have a concrete idea of your professional worth before negotiations begin.

Once you determine a fair salary range, take time to consider other areas of potential negotiation, including vacation time, health benefits, bonuses and work/life balance options, such as flextime and telecommuting. Create a list of your requirements, as well as a list of the options and benefits you would like to have. As you divide out your needs from your wants, you are building a negotiation cheat sheet that outlines where you will and will not compromise.

## When the Talks Begin

Negotiations should not begin until you know that you are the top candidate for the job, and you have a verbal or written offer to discuss. Once you have the offer, scrutinize the entire package. Even if the offer sounds great, let the hiring manager know you would like to review the offer and come back with questions. This window of time away from the employer's spotlight gives you a chance to review the details in a thoughtful manner and line up your pre-established job requirements with the job offer.

If you identify areas that require improvement, for example a salary that is under the going market range, arm yourself with the research you have done and prepare to advocate your experience, accomplishments and skills. The more prepared and thought out your position is in advance, the more comfortable, confident and persuasive you will be during the negotiation.

## The Business of Bargaining

With all your preparations complete, you are ready to talk. Remember: a job offer negotiation is nothing more than a conversation among professionals. Present your well-supported ideas with confidence and listen carefully to the hiring authority's responses and reasoning.

If you are unable to persuade the manager on a certain point, make a note of whether it is a job offer must-have or not and move on to the next discussion point. Avoid getting emotional or frustrated, which would create an uncomfortable environment for both you and the hiring manager. By the end of the discussion, you should have a clear idea of whether the employer is willing to come back with a revised offer and if not, whether the offer is acceptable based on the bottom-line requirements you've established. In some cases, the hiring manager may need to go to HR or a team of superiors in order to modify the offer. Be patient and take the same cautious and informed approach when it's time to review revised offers.

## Tips for Technology Professionals

*While the IT market has seen hard times in recent years, it doesn't mean all negotiations are off for skilled technology professionals. Here are some reminders for IT job seekers looking to negotiate the best job offer:*

**Change Is Good** – *Due to market conditions, many IT workers today have worked for several employers rather than one company for a long duration. A resume full of experience, even at various organizations, is an asset in today's IT marketplace and should not hinder you from a fair job offer or keep you from the negotiating table.*

**Look Beyond Salary** – *Instead of focusing solely on hitting the high end of your salary range at a time when businesses have limited hiring funds, consider how other benefits or work/life options (vacation days, flexible scheduling, etc.) might improve the job offer.*

## In the End

With a little back and forth, you will soon know whether you have negotiated a fair, acceptable job offer or whether it's time to seek out an opportunity that better meets your needs. No matter the final decision, always leave negotiations on the best of terms, thanking hiring managers for their time in discussing the offer, the company's viewpoint and your qualifications. Whether you accept the job or not, you have conducted yourself skillfully, demonstrating to the employer your professionalism and preparation, while reminding yourself of the value and skills you can bring to the right organization.