

SALARY NEGOTIATION

Negotiating a salary is one of the toughest things job seekers have to do. Information about how much the job pays is usually scarce, and salary discussions are not held on a level playing field.

But, as always, knowledge is power. If you know what to do, you may get the money you want.

If you're applying for a job at a company with a well-established compensation program, they know the exact salary range for the job and will make an offer accordingly. There's not too much you can do about it. But most firms don't have such programs, and then it is up to you.

Determining what you should be paid, means doing your homework in advance of the actual negotiations. Usually this occurs after the job offer has been made. It's important to study surveys, talk to colleagues, contact professional associations in your field, and do an Internet search of wage structures.

And, remember everything is not set in stone.

In negotiating a salary, there is typically a 15 to 20 percent range in which to work. You can drive hard negotiations, if you have the job skill sets in great demand, such as problem solving combined with technical skills and the experience required.

Let the employer make the first move. That way, you might get more than you anticipated. In other words, don't negotiate against yourself.

Even the most experienced job seekers are nervous about salary discussion, but to be successful you have to appear calm and confident. Don't be confrontational and never give an ultimatum. Even if you don't get the salary you want, you still may want the job.

Regard the initial offer as the start of a conversation. The employer has more leverage than you do, but you are still two people focused on the same goal. And remember, the larger the salary you want, the longer the negotiation process.

There's still a very tight labor market, so you do have an edge. Begin by having a bottom-line number in mind for the total compensation package you want; one that includes basic salary, health benefits, and stock options. Be flexible in the way you work with the hiring officer to reach your goal. This might mean a lower basic salary, augmented by a sign-on bonus.

And even if you don't get the salary you want, if you really like the culture, take the job and go for it. All the pay in the world doesn't matter, if you're miserable.

And you can always ask for a salary review in six months, based on your performance, and start the process all over again.

