

Never negotiate salary

Written by Julie Desmond
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Sometimes people send in tough questions; maybe there is more than one solution, or the solution is strongly intertwined in someone's personal situation, so the answer becomes, "It depends." However, the number one question that recruiters hear, and the question that has only one answer, is the salary question. I hope, someday, I hop in a Cash Cab and someone asks me about my salary expectations. I will get that one right every time.

When you are involved in a job change or up for promotion, your answer about salary has two parts: First, what you are earning now and, second, what the position is worth. That's it. There is no negotiation when it comes to salary.

The first part matters because, if you are currently earning a certain amount, you should never take less for any other position. Even when making a transition from one career to another, you bring experience, maturity and fresh perspective. Don't discount yourself. The money you earn now is your baseline, your minimum acceptable pay. Of course, if you are not currently working, that number is pretty low.

The second part matters more. The day you applied for this position, you began researching the responsibilities and expectations for the job. You went online and consulted salary calculators. You asked around. You called your recruiter friend and verified your numbers. You know, with certainty, what people get paid for the job you want. No trying to get more than you are worth; you want what is fair for the position. If "fair" means taking less than you are currently earning, stay where you are and look for a more appropriate opportunity, because this isn't it.

Now, when asked your salary expectation, you will say, firmly, directly, and without hesitation, "I know that the average pay for this position is (x) dollars."

The shrewd hiring manager will say, "Our budget is way below that."

You say, "Are the responsibilities different than the job description we discussed?"

Manager: "No, but..." She will not say, "We're just really cheap." But you can decide for yourself whether to read into it that way.

You say, "I am currently making (x) dollars. Through my research, I understand this position is worth (x) dollars, and after everything we've talked about, I'm really excited about this position. Please let me know if you'd like to make an offer, and we can go from there."

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“...go from there,” means, “And then I will make a decision about whether I want to work for your company.” The manager should have done the same research you did, knows the same numbers you know, and understands that the market determines pay rates better than any negotiation can. If the manager can't pay you fairly, is this a place you want to work?

If you decide to take less than a fair wage, know why. Is there an offer to offset salary by providing something else of value – stock options, fully paid benefits, tuition assistance? These all have monetary value. Accept or decline the position based on the offer you receive. Salary is one thing you never have to negotiate.

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