

Talking compensation

Written by Julie Desmond
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This topic just keeps coming up. Only three days into his new position, Ricky sent me the only email that makes me crazy. He wrote, "I just want to be sure I got the vacation I was promised when I took this position. A lot of people here have less vacation than I asked for."

The only way to know how much vacation time your co-workers have is to ask them. Discussing vacations and salaries is a lose-lose conversation. I've written about this before, and yet the topic comes up so regularly and so predictably that it seems people might appreciate being reminded: When a conversation between co-workers involves compensation, someone will always walk away mad.

Example one: you find out your co-worker, doing the same job, makes more money than you do. You immediately feel slighted. Did you think to ask said co-worker how much education he or she has? How many years of experience? How much of that experience was in the industry you're working in now?

Example two: you learn that you earn considerably more than your co-worker and have more vacation time, too. Now what? Do you go back to your supervisor and offer to return the extra time and money? Your co-worker does not know that you had far more vacation in your last job and that your experience is highly valued in this company. Your co-worker might not realize that your software experience or your ability to make client calls supersedes theirs by a mile. All they know is you are unfairly overcompensated, they're being ripped off and lunch breaks are no fun anymore.

Compensation is a delicate science. Most companies, and specifically large companies, place a high value on equity in the workplace. Many are bound by government contracts or shareholder agreements to play and pay fair. Therefore, they pay analysts a good salary (a fair salary) to look at every factor related to what you might be worth to the organization. Do you have industry knowledge gained by working for a competitor? Are you especially talented in an area where finding skilled workers has been tough? Are we asking you to leave a better salary or longer vacation time to come work here?

When you accepted your position, you agreed to work in exchange for a stated pay rate. If you want to make more money, you will not get it out of conversations with your colleagues. You have to earn it. Now get back to work.

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