

INTERVIEWS: NEGOTIATE WITH CONFIDENCE

Takeaway Points

- Salary is just one job offer negotiation topic; other grounds for negotiation include better benefits, more time off, and telecommuting.
- If a salary increase is non-negotiable, try asking for a sign-on bonus or early performance review that includes a pay increase.
- Don't sign any offer until you're clear on and agree with everything it outlines.

By: Team Pongo

OK, you've got the job offer. While it may not give you everything you were looking for, you know they want you, and you want them. Should you ask for more money? How about working one day a week from home? Of course, it doesn't hurt to ask, but it's best to pick a couple of spots where you believe you can win rather than ask for so much that the company winds up withdrawing the offer.

Remember that negotiating is its own reward and you shouldn't dread it. Even if you don't get the results you desire, you'll feel better about yourself for making the effort to negotiate. You will also communicate to the employer that you are serious about your career and want the best for yourself and your family (if applicable).

Remember: Don't sign any offer until you're clear on and agree with everything it outlines. If it's a very detailed offer letter with parts you don't understand, ask the employer to clarify them. You may also want to call on an attorney to interpret legal matters you can't fully grasp.

NEGOTIATION ETIQUETTE

Should you negotiate in person? Over the phone? And with whom?

The best scenario is face to face with the hiring manager, with the phone as an alternative. It allows you to project confidence in your ability to deliver for the company and reinforce in the hiring manager's mind how much you can contribute to the company. After all, the hiring manager wants you because of the skills and experience you can deliver.

Negotiating with anyone else is usually a waste of time. Many companies – especially larger ones – have a representative from Human Resources (HR) present the job offer over the phone. But HR is usually powerless to negotiate with you. No matter what the representative agrees to, they still need to win agreement from the hiring manager. Sometimes, you'll find a position through an agency recruiter, which can be helpful in expressing your salary requirements. But it's also important to note that while a recruiter negotiates on your behalf, they also have no power to get an offer higher than the mid-point of the salary range.

WHAT TO NEGOTIATE

Salary. Most job offer negotiations revolve around compensation. If you've done your research, you should have a good idea of the salary range for the position. Whether the initial offer is within the range or not, your research should tell you if you'll be able to get the employer to bump up the base salary. If you can't, here are alternatives that can help you boost your compensation:

INTERVIEWS: NEGOTIATE WITH CONFIDENCE

“Picking your battles is critical in negotiating the terms of a job offer. Select one or two points in the offer that are important to you and that you believe the employer can agree on.”

- **Performance bonuses.** Many employers take a liking to bonus incentives since they can inspire people to work harder. These bonuses can be based on an individual's performance, or on the company meeting or exceeding financial or performance goals. If you feel your base salary is too low and the employer doesn't want to move much on it, consider proposing a performance bonus (usually a percentage of your base salary) that would be based on meeting a set of performance goals.
- **Quicker performance review.** If your first job performance review is, say, six months after you take the job, ask for a three-month review that would carry a raise if you were to meet pre-established performance goals. This poses a mutual benefit: more money for you and, for the employer, an early glimpse at what you can deliver.
- **Signing bonus.** Starting salary may be limited due to internal salary ranges or internal equity with other employees. But a signing bonus would avoid conflicts with internal norms while providing you with an initial cash payout. One caveat: If they give you a bonus, they might want you to guarantee that you'll be with the company for a specified period of time at the risk of having to forfeit all or part of the bonus.

Telecommuting. Today's technology enables more people to work from the comfort of home, allowing more time with their families and less time commuting to the office. Many employers believe a work-life balance is important to employee morale and, by extension, productivity. If your would-be employer doesn't need you in the office every day, if your commute is substantial, or you have school-age children who would otherwise come home to an empty house or head off to after-school child care, then working from home one or two days a week may be a reasonable benefit to request.

More Time Off. If work-life balance is important, an extra week of vacation or a flexible schedule (e.g., one 4-day week each month), may be something the employer would be willing to allow.

Higher Company-Paid Health Insurance. With the ever-increasing cost of health care and employers wanting their workers to foot more of the bill, asking the employer to kick in a higher percentage – rather than offer more money – may be a good negotiating point since the employer will likely get some of it back in the form of a tax break.

Of course, there are other items you may want to put on the table, such as a company-paid cell phone or Internet access at home. Or, if you're relocating, and the company hasn't stated in its job posting that it will not cover relocation expenses, consider asking the company to pay for you to move. (However, this may not work in a down economy or if the company is struggling financially.)

INTERVIEWS: NEGOTIATE WITH CONFIDENCE

Did you know?

Pongo's Interview Tips video program provides 12 how-to videos for every stage of the interview, plus printable checklists and interview guides.

PICK YOUR BATTLES

Picking your “battles” is critical in negotiating the terms of a job offer. Select one or two points in the offer that are important to you and that you believe the employer can agree on. If they're enthusiastic at the prospect of landing someone with your skills and experience to help achieve their goals, they just might be willing to honor your request.

www.pongoresume.com

Pongo Resume is a full-service online resource for job seekers. The Pongo Resume web site provides all the tools and support needed to write professional resumes and cover letters, ace tough interviews, and secure a great job. Pongo members generate over 100,000 resumes per month. Privately held and headquartered in Northborough, Massachusetts, Pongo Resume currently has more than 4 million registered members and averages over a half-million unique visitors per month. In 2009-2011, Pongo was named to the Inc. 5000 list of America's fastest-growing private companies.