

JOB OFFERS AND OFFER NEGOTIATIONS

Following one or more interviews, an employer may offer you a job. Often the job offer is made over the phone or in person. Avoid accepting the position on the spot, unless of course you know all of the details of the offer and do not wish to negotiate anything (very rare). When an offer is made to you, it is best to ask for some time (a few days to a couple weeks) to consider the offer and discuss it with the significant others in your life. Once you and the employer have worked out a date by which a decision must be made, it is time to get down to the business of understanding the offer (e.g. salary, benefits, start date etc.). It is at this point that you may decide to negotiate the offer. It is important to remember that in most cases you are expected to negotiate so there is no need to feel uncomfortable with the process. Just be sure you conduct yourself in a professional manner throughout the negotiations.

You should also listen to your instincts when considering an offer. Be sure to consider your fit with the organization and the pros and cons of accepting or declining the offer before making any decision.

WHEN TO NEGOTIATE

You should never bring up salary or benefits until an actual offer has been made to you. If the employer brings up salary during the interview process to ask what sort of salary range you are looking for, it is always best to answer with a well researched range. Avoid instigating any salary or benefit discussions yourself. Only when the formal offer has been made, does it become acceptable for you to ask questions regarding salary and benefits. If you have already accepted an offer you cannot go back and attempt to negotiate. This is why it is so important to always ask for at least a few days to consider any offer.

WHAT TO NEGOTIATE

Salary is always the first thing that pops into peoples' heads when the term negotiation is mentioned. Although salary is the most commonly negotiated aspect of any job offer, there are many other elements that can be negotiated. Other negotiable aspects of job offers include: start date, moving expenses, paid time off, stock options, bonuses, work schedule, flex time, early performance reviews, geographic location (e.g. Indianapolis office instead of Chicago office), professional development, use of company car, company phone, further education assistance.

Retirement plans and health insurance plans are not negotiable. These plans are applied to an entire organization and typically cannot be altered for individuals.

HOW TO NEGOTIATE

1. RESEARCH

You must do some research before you can negotiate any offer. You need to determine what the cost of living is going to be in your new location and what the average salaries are for similar positions to the one you are considering. Without this information you will not be able to craft a well informed counter offer. Use the following resources to help you with your research:

Cost of Living Websites – <http://bestplaces.net/> (Sperlings Best Places) and <http://www.homefair.com/> (Home Fair)

Salary Websites – www.bls.gov/ooh (Occupational Outlook Handbook), www.salary.com, and www.payscale.com

At this point you also want to clarify any questions you have about benefits, vacation time, performance reviews, etc. with the employer.

2. DETERMINE WHAT YOU WANT

Once you have completed the necessary research you should be able to determine your market value and set a walk away point for your negotiations. It is best to set this for yourself before you ever make a counter offer. Be sure to stay realistic when setting this point for yourself. If you are negotiating salary, ask yourself: what is the realistic amount you would need to make to live comfortably that is in line with industry averages for your location? If you are planning to negotiate for other things, be sure you have strong justifications for what you are going to ask for.

3. ASK FOR IT (PROFESSIONALLY)

Formal negotiations are typically conducted in writing, in person, or over the phone. In your counter offer you should do the following:

1. Express your appreciation, excitement, and continued interest in the position....HOWEVER (never say "but")
2. State the reasons for your counter offer (why you are not able to accept the initial offer)
3. Propose a solution by stating what you would like. Be sure to justify each of your negotiated points (e.g. provide average salary research).
4. Once again express your appreciation.

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NEGOTIATING TIPS

Be sure you are negotiating with the correct person. This is as simple as asking the person who made you the offer if you should address negotiation correspondence to them or to someone else.

Stick to your goals and walk away point. This is not the time to get greedy or unrealistic. You have done the research and should know what is reasonable. Do not overstep that.

Remember that you may have to work directly with the person you are negotiating with. That makes it all the more essential that you conduct yourself in the most professional manner possible.

ACCEPTING JOB OFFERS

Once you have decided to accept a job offer (having gone through negotiations or not) you must formally accept in writing. Your acceptance letter should include all of the specific points that were negotiated and should always include your start date and salary. Your acceptance letter should look just like your cover letter in terms of formatting. Remember you want all of the materials you submit to an employer to look the same. Below is a sample acceptance letter:

Lucy Johnson
johnsonl@gmail.com | (555)555-5555 476
E. Fender Lane, Lexington, KY 40536

April 24, 2012

Damon Smith
Director of Human Resources
Crimson Fitness and Wellness, Inc.
6745 Steamer Drive, Suite 2400
Chicago, IL 60111

Dear Mr. Smith,

I am writing to formally accept the Wellness Coach position with Crimson Fitness and Wellness. I am very excited about joining the Crimson team. The Wellness Coach position is exactly what I have been looking for, and I am so grateful for the opportunity you have offered me.

I look forward to starting on May 20th, 2012 with an annual salary of \$34,000. I will report to work that morning at 8 AM having already completed the medical examination and drug testing that you requested.

Should you need any additional information prior my start date, please do not hesitate to contact me at johnsonl@gmail.com or (555)555-5555. Thank you again for not only this amazing opportunity, but also for your time and consideration. I look forward to working with you all.

Sincerely,
Lucy Johnson
Lucy Johnson

Once you accept an offer, you should withdraw your name from consideration for other positions to which you have applied as a courtesy to those organizations. Once you accept an offer, you should honor that commitment and no longer consider other offers. It is unprofessional to accept a position and then back out. **Be sure you consider all offers carefully.**

DECLINING JOB OFFERS

You must formally decline any job offers that you have chosen not to accept. You can choose to write a letter formally declining the offer or speak with the person who made the offer either in person or over the phone. Be sure to decline within the window of time that was discussed at the time the offer was made to you. If you choose to write a letter, be sure to format it just like you formatted your cover letter. (See above for formatting.) When declining a job offer it is essential to be professional, cordial, and appreciative. Always thank the employer for their time and consideration. You do not have to offer a reason in a letter. However, if your decline in person or over the phone, they may ask you why you are turning down the position. Have an answer prepared that is both respectful and professional (e.g. family reasons, not the best fit at this time, etc.). You want to keep this employer within your professional network so be sure not to burn any bridges!