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How to Get What You Are Worth

By Mary Pergander

This article originally appeared in the July 2005 issue of Info Career Trends.

Oh, happy day! You've interviewed for a good job, and they have called to offer you the position. Now, they are going to make you the perfect offer of your dreams, right? Hold on!

Whenever you are being offered a new position, remember the True Objective: The EMPLOYER wants to get the best person possible, for the least (yet fair) money. YOU want the best salary and benefit package possible, for work you truly want to do. It isn't the employer's role to get you the best package possible - that is YOUR responsibility! So, here are a few tips to help that happen...

What Are You Worth?

First, do a little experiment. Write down your current salary, or, if you are unemployed, the salary you expect to obtain in your next job. Got it? Now, write down a number that is DOUBLE the first number. In other words, if the first number is \$30,000, write down \$60,000.

Look carefully at the doubled number. Are you worth that much? Can you imagine yourself being paid that much money? Are your skills and experiences worth that much to you or to an employer? How does it feel to imagine making that amount?

Now, take your original number again, and add just ten percent to it. In other words, \$30,000 becomes \$33,000. How does that number look to you? Are you worth that much? Can you imagine your next employer paying you that amount?

Chances are, the doubled number made you somewhat (or very) uncomfortable. The ten percent higher figure, in comparison, seems doable.

The salary package an employer offers is a result of several factors. The one you can control is the value you put on yourself, and you can do that by being your own best advocate.

Carefully think through the work- and non-work-related skills and experiences you offer an employer. Even for entry-level positions, you might have more than entry-level qualifications that are of value. Remember also that the "starting" salaries listed in employment ads DON'T mean there isn't room to negotiate!

What Can You Negotiate?

If you have done your initial homework well and are reasonably confident that you and the employer will have similar salary ranges in mind, avoid mentioning ANY numbers in the interview process. Wait to discuss salary expectations until you know the employer wants to hire YOU! Be careful not to assume that you know what the employer is going to offer you - even if a starting salary appeared in print. And, when negotiating, don't confuse "starting offer" with "only" or "best" offer!

When an employer contacts you to discuss an offer, use the following steps to get the best possible package:

1. Thank them for their interest in you and confirm your desire to come to a mutually agreeable arrangement.
2. Be certain you clearly understand the job requirements. Confirm this with a statement like, "Now, as I understand it, my responsibilities in this job would include..."
3. Avoid stating your salary expectation until they state a number first.
4. When they give a number, BE PATIENT. Thank them for their offer. Confirm again that you are confident that you can come to an agreeable arrangement. Ask for time to consider the offer. Also, ask any clarifying questions you have: "Is that per week or per month?"
5. When you call back to respond to the offer, review what YOU bring to the table: "It seems my experience writing grants will be of value in this position, and my business contacts from three years volunteering at the Chamber of Commerce will be of value to the library in the fundraising projects for next year."
6. Reiterate that you want to accept the job, but that you were expecting more than the initial offer.
7. Pause.
8. They may either ask what salary you are looking for, or they may increase their offer at this point - or neither! Regardless, proceed to clarify the benefits of the position: "As I understand it, this position is eligible for health insurance - is that correct?"
9. Consider the entire package - salary offer and benefits (as well as the job opportunity itself) as one complete offer. Is tuition reimbursement offered? How much is that worth to you? CAUTION: Know the crucial difference between health insurance being available and being a paid benefit. The difference can be \$5000 to \$6000 per year!

When is it time to stop negotiating and give your final answer? Consider: What is your gut telling you? What is your heart telling you? What is your mind telling you?

Whatever you decide, give the employer your answer graciously. Whether yes or no, follow up immediately with a written thank-you note. If you accept the job and package, be certain to get the details in writing. It is also acceptable to write your understanding of the agreement and send it along, asking if it is correct.

Success in getting the best possible package is as much a result of doing your own inner homework as it is of your knowledge of the job market and employer. Use both to get the best possible package when you next change jobs.

Mary Pergander has been the Library Director at Lake Bluff Public Library in Lake Bluff, Illinois since October 2002. Previously, she held an administrative level position in another field. Mary has had extensive hiring experience, and is passionate on the subject of teaching individuals the skills needed to improve their livelihoods.

Misery Loves Company – Meeting Planners Show Similar Salary Trends

Meetings and Conventions, a print journal for event planners, published a supplement in the August 2005 issue giving the results of its national annual salary survey. There were 564 corporate and 495 association planners who responded. It was no surprise that corporate salaries were higher than association salaries by approximately 10% (\$62,200 and \$56,100 respectively). What was surprising was the significant disparity between the salaries of men and women in this primarily female profession.

For associations, the average salary was \$52,177, with \$53,400 for women and \$71,000 for men. Eighty-five percent of respondents were women, earning 73.4 cents for every dollar earned by men. Women were typically younger than men (43.7 vs. 47.1 years old) and had worked fewer years (11.8 vs. 14.6 years). Men worked a longer average week than women (50.4 vs. 46.4 hours). Most association planners, 71%, had received a raise in 2004. **Certified Meeting Planners** earned \$5400 more than non-certified planners (\$60,300 vs. \$54,900).

For corporate respondents, the average salary was \$65,000, with \$58,000 for women and \$82,300 for men, meaning women earned 70 cents on average per dollar men earned. The average age and years in the profession were similar,

43.7 years old and 12 years as a planner for women and 45.9 years old and 12.6 years for men. Eighteen percent earned less than \$40,000 and nine percent had salaries at \$100,000 or more.

Admittedly, there may be some issue with the respondent pool. No response rate was given. According to the Convention Industry Council, there are more than 100,000 people in the meetings, conventions and exhibitions industries, though we do not know how many of them were surveyed by *Meetings and Conventions*. The 2001 corporate survey pool was 42% male, while the 2005 pool was only 17% male. Although it is possible that the proportion of men and women has shifted that dramatically in four years, all data should be read and used with some degree of caution.

2005 Salary Survey. *Meetings and Conventions Salary Survey Supplement*. August 2005.

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