



Salary Negotiation: Always Ask for More, or Take the Offer?

By Dona DeZube, Monster Finance Careers Expert

When you're negotiating salary, should you always shoot for more or take the company's first offer? With unemployment at alarmingly high levels, job seekers worry that negotiating salary too hard will cause the employer to rescind the offer. On the flip side, nobody wants to be lowballed.

So where's the balance point in a salary negotiation? [Monster's Negotiation Expert Paul Barada](#) on the [Salary & Negotiation Tips forum](#) says you should take the first offer if you're happy with it. Never negotiate just for the sake of negotiating. Some career experts agree with that position; others don't. Here's a deeper look at both sides of the issue.

Pro: Always Negotiate

When a company finds the right candidate, it is willing to negotiate salary, says Adriana Llamas, author of [Career Sudoku: 9 Ways to Win the Job Search Game](#). "Everyone knows there's a second choice, but it's never as good as the first choice, and there's always more budget for Candidate No. 1," she says. "Keeping in mind that companies have budgets to respect, salary negotiation is part of the hiring process."

If you're at the stage where the employer is negotiating salary with you, the employer wants you, adds career coach Lauren Milligan of ResuMayday, a Warrenville, Illinois, career-counseling firm. "You have value to them," she says. "That isn't going to disappear simply because you give a little push-back at their first offer."

Another salary negotiation tip to know is that for some positions, you are simply expected to negotiate regardless of the offer, says career coach Darrell Gurney, author of [Headhunters Revealed! Career Secrets for Choosing and Using Professional Recruiters](#).

"For a business-development or sales position, a laissez-faire attitude in simply accepting what is initially offered can actually kill your chances because it shows a neglect for a basic element in all business dealings: negotiation," he says. "If a candidate fails to show an appreciation and skill in engaging in salary negotiation, that can be interpreted by the employer as ineptness."

Con: When Not to Negotiate

Other career experts say there are times when you shouldn't negotiate salary at all -- like when you don't have a good reason you should be paid more than you're offered.

"When I was a corporate manager, I rescinded offers when people tried to negotiate salary without sufficient justification," says Gwen Ward, a principal at Fish Out of Water, a professional-development company in Leesburg, Virginia. "This revealed another view of their analytic skills that I apparently missed in the interview process. But in other cases, I met their counteroffers if their request was well-thought-out and leveraged their previous accomplishments to the department or company goals."

Negotiating salary when there's a big gap between what the company is offering and what you want is also a waste of time, says Lavie Margolin, job search adviser and author of [Lion Cub Job Search: Practical Job Search Assistance for Practical Job Seekers](#).

A recent graduate who worked with Margolin illustrates the reason. "They had entry-level jobs related to his field of training but paid an admittedly low salary for the industry -- a salary that was made clear to him in advance," she explains. "He went through several rounds of interviews and then demanded over double what the employer was willing to pay. He created no room for negotiation and dug his heels in. Of course, he was not offered the position."

Salary negotiation is always a risk, she adds. "By not accepting the offer right away, it leaves it open for other candidates to come into the picture," Margolin says.

Salary: Just One Part of a Bigger Picture

Salary is just one component of the [offer package](#), but it's the one that most often generates a gut response if it's too low or euphoria if it's more than you were expecting, says Kevin Kermes, a Washington, DC, executive coach.

However, what may be just as important is whether you feel passionate about what the company does, trust your peers and believe the role is one in which you can truly thrive, be successful and be happy. "The compensation package becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy with or without these key components in place," he says. "An average or even below-average package with excellent leadership, peer support, and a product or service you love will eventually manifest itself in excellent performance. This can result in bonuses, increased responsibilities, greater job security and promotions."

In the end, job conditions dictate what you can achieve and, therefore, your future compensation, not the other way around, he concludes.