

How to Negotiate Your Salary

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Did you negotiate your starting salary? If not, you're not alone. It turns out that **women are less likely than men to initiate salary negotiations when the starting salary isn't presented as negotiable**, according to an experiment in a new National Bureau of Economic Research working paper.

Experiment administrators posted two variations of a real job listing for an assistant in nine U.S. cities. One ad presented the wages as negotiable, while one did not. Then, administrators assessed the ad response and interview behaviors of the nearly 2,500 job seekers who replied. Compared to men, women were less likely to negotiate salary when the possibility of negotiation was not presented in the ad. But when the option was presented, women were more likely to negotiate. Here's the thing: most employers aren't going to tell you about wiggle room in the salary they offer. And if you take an employer's first bid,

you could leave hundreds of thousands of dollars on the table over the course of your career. Your starting salary impacts how big future raises are (especially if they're given as a percentage of what you currently make), and can even impact how much you're paid at different companies. Over the years, that first initial difference really adds up.

"Negotiation is not an option," says Ford R. Myers, career coach with 20 years of experience and author of *Get the Job You Want, Even When No One's Hiring*. "If you're a candidate that doesn't negotiate, you're not being professional."

Along those lines, often the best salary doesn't go to the person most qualified, but the person who negotiates best. So wait for the employer to bring up compensation (this may happen early in the interview process, or later when they're ready to make you an offer), and then use these tips to get the compensation you deserve.

BEFORE THEY MAKE AN OFFER...

Your goal during the interview process is to present yourself in the best light possible, so the interviewer knows that you're interested in the position and the company—not just the cash. But salary negotiations can begin even before the interview, so navigate this minefield to make sure the first offer you get is one you can work with.

Come prepared.

Before entering an interview, do a competitive analysis on your current job title and the position you're pursuing. Use sites such as payscale.com, salary.com, vault.com, glassdoor.com, or salaryexpert.com. Later, you can use this information to inform and leverage your negotiations.

Never present the first number.

When the employer asks for salary expectations, they're trying to weed out candidates they can't afford

and determine how much it would take to bring you on board. However, your salary should be determined by how well you can fulfill the needs of the new company. And no matter what number you present, there's a good chance that the interviewer had a higher number in mind. So don't answer. Instead, throw the question back to the employer by saying "I'm sure you have a fair compensation in mind. I'd like to be paid the same as someone else of my caliber. What does someone of my caliber make?" If they don't budge, try another angle: "If we decide that I'm the right candidate, I'm sure compensation will not be an issue. Can you tell me what the range is for someone in this position with my experience?"

If you positively have to throw out a number, come up with a range that begins at about 20 percent higher than what you want, says Joel Garfinkle, career coach with 17 years of experience and author of *Get Paid What You're Worth*. Add twenty percent to that for the top of your range. "Once you give your number you can only go down," he says.

Avoid sharing your current salary.

Again, you don't want to show the employer your cards, so explain that the job you're interviewing for has more responsibilities than your current position. If you have to reveal your salary, make it as high as you can without being dishonest, says Garfinkle. Add bonuses, paid vacation time, and other perks (think travel reimbursement) as a dollar value on top of your actual salary. Then reference your salary research as evidence that you're currently being underpaid.

AFTER THEY MAKE AN OFFER...

The balance of power has shifted—suddenly, you know that you're the first-choice candidate, and that knowledge gives you more leverage. Here's what to do with it.

Be courteous, but ask for more.

When a company makes an offer, assume (secretly) that they can always give a little more. "It's the lowest number they can utter without feeling completely embarrassed," says Myers.

Be courteous and respectful, but be direct, says Garfinkle. Say: "The amount you are suggesting is different from the amount I feel I'm worth and I feel I deserve. I expected [name the range calculated above] based on the value I would bring to the company and the average salary for this position." Reiterate that you want to work for the company, and then ask them to take another look at their budgets to see if they can come closer to your range. If possible, have this conversation with your potential boss, or the person who controls the budgets, not a recruiter or human resources rep who can't approve a higher salary.

If this conversation comes off as alarmingly daunting, remember that it can only play out a few different ways. Practice these scenarios with a career coach, friend, or family member, playing both roles for a 360-degree perspective:

Scenario 1: They agree to the salary you've requested.

Say this: "I appreciate your flexibility." Then move on to negotiate benefits.

Scenario 2: They try to compensate for the skimpy salary with exemplary benefits.

Say this: "Let's settle salary first." Don't mix the two.

Scenario 3: They're insulted by your salary request.

Say this: "I'm sorry you feel that way, I think it's reasonable given how perfectly my experience matches the responsibilities you've listed for this position." Then elaborate on particular parts of your resume that lend well to their needs.

Scenario 4: They don't have the budget—or just don't budge.

Say this: "I understand, but I'm sorry to hear that. If you can find a way to secure the funds to pay me at an appropriate level, I'd be happy to speak with you further."

Scenario 5: They meet your salary request halfway.

Say this: "I appreciate that you've been flexible with me, perhaps I can be flexible with you. Let me think about it and get back to you in the next twenty-four hours." Then call them within the time you've allotted and say: "I understand your salary limit of X, but I was hoping for Y. Have you been able to find any more funds for this position?" If the answer is no but the opportunity is a good career move, explain that you'd be willing to reduce your number if they are able to show some flexibility on two to three other matters. Then transition into negotiating things that don't cost money, like start date, telecommuting, flexible work hours, benefits, and so on.