
Negotiating Your First Professional Job Offer

Negotiating the first professional job offer is more than wrangling for a good starting paycheck. Follow these tips to ensure that you begin your career under the best possible terms!

Tip 1—Know what is realistic. Research appropriate salaries for your industry, employer, and position by using Glassdoor, Payscale, O*Net, other online resources, and your network. Understand that employers may consider titles, location/travel, experience, college degree, and special skills in setting a value on the position. Titles can be more or less inclusive depending on the employer so always review the responsibilities of the position. Also, due to demand in certain fields, an entry level salary for a particular position in one industry may vary greatly from another.

Tip 2—Know what you need/want. Career expert Christine DiDonato emphasizes knowing your “must-haves” for the next 1-3 years by asking yourself “What do I value?” “What motivates me?” and “What am I well-suited for?” Is it important that you be challenged on your job? Do you want opportunities for growth? Is the culture/team environment satisfactory to you? It is equally important to know what your “walk-aways” or non-negotiables are. Thirdly, what are your “trade-offs?”— what are you willing to give up to get in its place? Understand key terms that employers use including Base Pay, Bonus Pay, Relocation Expenses, Paid Time Off, Fringe Benefits, Stock, and Equity. If the position would require a move to another area, research the cost of living in that area.

Tip 3—Determine your salary range. Ideally, the bottom of your range should be at or above the minimum salary you would like to earn. If pressed by the employer to state your desired salary, pick the high end of your range to start the negotiation. When/if the employer counters your offer, give a number that is higher than theirs but slightly lower than your initial number. Exercise patience; don’t be too quick to come back with a number (this is not an auction!) and don’t indicate your lowest salary too early.

Tip 4—Include other benefits. If the employer has settled on a number that is lower than you want, ask about other considerations such as a sign-on bonus, extended paid-time off, stock options, possibility of a 30- or 60-day review with raise, etc.

Tip 5—Get the offer in writing. If the negotiation is taking place through a meeting or conversation, it’s important to ask for the offer, with all negotiated items, to be put into writing for consideration. Also ask how much time you can have to review the offer (typically, candidates can have 48 hours to consider an offer, but your mileage may vary so ask!)

Tip 6—Evaluate the offer. Ask yourself these questions:

- Is this the right fit for me?
- What will I gain? Lose?
- Does this satisfy my “must-haves”?
- What am I willing to “trade-off” in this offer?
- Am I being offered fair market value? (Check with professionals in your network).

Tip 7—Be professional throughout the process. Most employers will expect candidates to negotiate and will be watching to see how you handle this. Be prepared with questions and counterpoints, look at the process from their point of view, do not come across as inflexible or unrealistic, and don't try to wear them down with multiple rounds of questions.

Tips for Young Professionals (from Christine DiDonato)

- Use informational interviewing with professionals to gauge starting salaries—“What do you think would be a reasonable starting salary for this position at this employer?”
- Use experiences from college (school projects, internships, skills mastered) to show your value
- Use negotiation as a vehicle for showing strong communication skills
- Look for opportunities to learn and grow in positions; do not focus solely on salary

Still not comfortable negotiating? Check out LinkedIn Learning (through Center for Digital Transformation) for video how-tos on Negotiating Job Offers! (<https://louisville.edu/digital-transformation/learn>)

Resources

Salary Information:

<https://www.jobsearchintelligence.com/etc/jobseekers/salary-calculator.php>

<https://www.onetonline.org/> (Find your occupation, then click on Wages & Trends tab)

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/> (Find your occupation, then click on Pay tab)

<https://www.glassdoor.com/Salaries/know-your-worth.htm>

<https://www.salary.com/>

<https://www.salarylist.com/>

<https://www.payscale.com/>

Advice on the negotiation process:

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/pay-salary/how-to-negotiate-salary>

<https://www.moneyunder30.com/best-salary-information-websites>

<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-negotiate-accept-or-decline-a-job-offer-2061398>

LinkedIn Learning: “Negotiating Your Job Offer” with Christine DiDonato

Cost of living calculator:

<https://www.bankrate.com/real-estate/cost-of-living-calculator/>

Quality of life:

https://www.numbeo.com/quality-of-life/region_rankings_current.jsp?region=019

<https://www.themuse.com/advice/best-cities-for-young-professionals-2022>