

Negotiating the Best Starting Salary

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Understandably, many people find discussing salaries uncomfortable and embarrassing during an interview. However, most interviewers expect some bartering and, if it motivates you to put more into the job, it is worthwhile for both the applicant and the employer. More than any other negotiation, a starting salary must result in a win-win situation.

Tips for negotiating the best starting salary

Know your value

Prior to the interview, research the company and salary range for the position you are applying for. Conduct a salary research so you can understand your market value by:

- Comparing salaries in job adverts – remember different locations might attract higher or lower wages
- Checking out online salary surveys (e.g. www.ukrecruiter.co.uk/salary.htm)
- Contacting people in the same job or industry to ask what other companies pay.

Say as little as possible

An interviewer will want to discuss salary as early as possible so they do not waste time with someone they cannot afford. They may also like to dwell on your past salary, in order to keep your salary expectations low. You need to delay the talk of salary as long as possible until you can convince them that you are the person they need. So:

- Avoiding discussing salary until you have a job offer. If you do, you could price yourself out of a job.
- Get the employer to disclose salary before you do.
- Do not disclose past salary. If pushed for a figure, you could say, 'but of course, I wouldn't accept that figure at today's rate of pay' or 'but I took that lower wage in lieu of training'. Alternatively, ensure you include the entire value of the package that you received – not just the basic salary.
- If pressed by the interviewers about desired salary, try 'What kind of salary range are you working with?' or 'I'd like to make as much as other employees with my qualifications' or 'What is a typical salary for this position?' or 'Until I learn more about the responsibilities I cannot make a meaningful suggestion, but will consider a reasonable offer'. Another strategy is name a pay range instead.

Sell your skills

Be prepared to talk about the skills and accomplishments that support the value you consider yourself to have.

Establish your target salary and absolute bottom line

Before you go into an interview, decide what salary you want to earn and what you are willing to settle for. It should be noticeably higher than what you earn now.

Your target salary should be at least 10–15% higher than the minimum salary you'd be willing to accept as this gives you some margin for negotiation. If you come down you should still end up with a salary at or higher than your minimum level.

Don't be afraid to add extras into your wish list during the negotiation phase – you can then drop these if necessary to appear flexible.

Take into account the whole package

When presented with an offer, include:

- Basic pay
- Bonuses
- Company car
- Gym membership
- Shares/stock options
- Health plans
- Pension schemes
- Maternity/paternity allowances
- Life/health insurance
- Travel allowances and cost of traveling to work
- Meal reimbursement/discounts
- Clothing allowances
- Holiday allowances
- Other staff discount schemes
- Training provision/discount schemes
- Frequent flier/hotel points saving schemes.

There can be a wide discrepancy between a basic salary and the value of the total package – so ensure you are seeing the complete picture.

Make the negotiation a friendly experience

Make the employer feel that you are on the same side, working together to find a package to satisfy everyone's needs. Don't try to bully the employer into offering a better deal. Don't bother telling one company about another offer that you have that's higher paying, unless they ask what other offers you have had.

Never agree straight away

Be enthusiastic and appreciative when you receive a job offer but always ask for 24 hours to respond. This will allow you thinking time in case anything occurs to you after the adrenalin of the meeting.

So you didn't get the offer you want – what now?

First, if a salary offer is made by letter, call to make an appointment to discuss it. Negotiating face-to-face is considerably more effective and likely to result in a positive outcome for you, because it shows you are prepared to put the time and effort into securing the right job. But if you feel you cannot do this, choose the medium of communication that you feel most comfortable with.

If the basic salary rate is strictly non-negotiable, try to achieve an increased amount in other bonuses or perks in the non-salary category. These might include a hiring bonus or relocation package, training that allows you to climb the earning ladder more quickly, extra holiday or a guarantee of promoting you after achieving certain milestones. Some people focus exclusively on salary when there may be other opportunities on offer that are far more valuable.

If you cannot negotiate a salary that you are happy with and you feel you need to decline the offer, do so on the best of terms. Treat every offer graciously, and don't burn bridges with potential business contacts.

If you do get the offer you want, make sure you get it in writing, and the letter is signed! Make sure that the letter includes *everything* you have agreed.