

SALARY NEGOTIATION 101

When do you need to start thinking about how to negotiate compensation for your new job? Believe it or not, it's crucial to address this issue before you send out a single resume.

Why? Quite simply, being unprepared for salary questions can cost you thousands of dollars and cause you to cede power in the "salary dance." Quite often, the question first comes up in the initial telephone call - perhaps from a Human Resources clerk who's screening candidates to weed through a huge stack of resumes, maybe from an executive recruiter, or possibly from a hiring manager you've contacted through a networking referral.

And if you have not prepared and practiced answering this question appropriately for each possible audience, you lose. You may lose a job opportunity. At the very least, you will lose future negotiating power. So how can you avoid this landmine?

FIRST: Understand when and to whom you should disclose salary.

As a general rule, it's expected (and not detrimental) to share your current compensation with an executive recruiter. These individuals need to know that you are a very close fit with the hiring company's specifications; they don't want to be in the position of recommending a candidate whose salary expectations are either too high or too low to be viable. Rest assured that all they want to know is whether you're "in the ballpark;" in all likelihood, they won't share your salary information with the hiring company, nor will they "lowball" an offer to match your current salary. In most cases, their commission is a percentage of your salary, so they are motivated to help you negotiate as high a salary as is fair and reasonable.

With employers, however, the story is quite different. It is neither necessary nor advantageous for you to reveal salary information - either history or requirements - before you have a job offer in hand. First of all, your current salary really has no bearing on the value you can deliver in the position under consideration; and why should you give the employer negotiation ammunition by revealing what you make now or believe you should earn?

SECOND: Learn how you can deflect salary questions - right from the first inquiry - professionally, appropriately, and without striking the wrong note in the interview. You can learn this crucial skill by reading books, doing online research (for relevant articles and advice), or engaging the services of a coach who can help you learn and practice the appropriate responses.

Here are a few guidelines.

Above all, be prepared for the question. Practice a variety of responses until you can say them naturally and non-defensively. Keep in mind (and communicate) that the primary purpose of the interview should be to determine whether you are the right person for the job. Convey the

assumption that the employer will pay an appropriate salary and continue to focus on determining fit.

Here are a few suggestions for ways to do this.

- In response to the question, "So, what salary are you looking for?"
 - "I'm most interested in determining if I'm the right person for this position. If there is a fit, I'm sure salary won't be an issue."
 - "I'm sure your company pays competitive salaries and that compensation won't be an issue if I'm the right person for the job."
 - "Before we talk salary, I think we should focus on whether I'm the right person for the job. If we mutually decide it is a good fit, we can talk particulars at that point."
- If the interviewer persists - "Yes, but we don't want to waste our time if our compensation figures aren't compatible. What are you looking for?"
 - "As I mentioned, I'm sure salary won't be an issue if the match is right. What range have you budgeted for this position? I'll be glad to tell you if it's in the ballpark."
- Then, if the interviewer responds with a range, you can reply,
 - "That's certainly in the ballpark. Let's keep talking to see if I'm the right person for this job."
 - "I'm interested in a compensation package that will keep me motivated and productive. I am sure your company pays competitive salaries to retain talented people. I assure you that salary will not be the deciding issue."
- If the interviewer presses further or says, "So, what will it take to bring you on board?"
 - "Are you offering me the position?" If the answer is, "Yes, I guess I am," you can reply, "What is the range you have in mind?"
 - If the answer is, "No, I think it's premature to do that," you can respond by saying, "I agree, I think we should focus on whether I'm the right person for this job."
 - "I'm excited about the position and eager to tackle the challenges we've discussed. I assume I'll be paid a salary that will keep me motivated and productive. What figure did you have in mind?"

FINALLY: If you feel pressured to respond with a salary figure: It's always best to quote a wide range rather than a specific figure. And be sure to base your salary expectations on facts, not what you "think you deserve" or even what you've been earning. Perform online research — BEFORE any interview — to determine appropriate salaries for the type of position you're seeking, so you'll be prepared to respond along these lines: "My research shows that salaries in the \$XX to \$YY range are appropriate for this position. I anticipate a competitive salary in that range."

IN SUMMARY, salary-negotiation preparation is an important early step in a successful job search. With a little practice, you'll be able to respond naturally, appropriately, and non-defensively when the question comes up, and you'll put yourself in an advantageous position to field appropriate offers. **Good luck!**