Evaluating and Negotiating Offers

Overview

Should you accept the first job offer that comes along? Should you just accept the salary you have been offered? These and many other questions arise when you are offered a position and require diligent thought. Once you have been made an offer, it is time to balance the factors you considered prior to applying for the position (e.g., stability of organization/industry, nature of the work) and after you interviewed (e.g., organizational culture, level of autonomy) with the compensation package you are being presented.

Reviewing a Job Offer

Needing Additional Information

As you are weighing different factors about the offer, you may have additional questions, need some additional data, or simply need a better sense of what the job/internship and organization are like. Therefore, you may need to follow up with one of your interviewers or discuss your questions with a Medill Career Services (MCS) staff member.

Considering the Whole Compensation Package

Your offer letter will include a salary, but you must refrain from using it as the only measure of evaluation. You are being offered a compensation **package**, which entails monetary and nonmonetary payment for your work. In addition to a base salary, you will want to understand:

- Overtime and bonus/commission structures
- Health benefits
- Reimbursement opportunities (e.g., health and wellness, tuition, parking)
- Company benefits (e.g., provided meals, flexible work schedule, on-site daycare)
- Vacation, holiday, and time-off schedules
- Relocation benefits

Managing Multiple Offers

Your hard work might land you multiple job offers (congratulations!), which adds complexity to your evaluation process. In order to make a sound decision, it is recommended that you:

- Consider the pros and cons about each offer (make a list)
- Review each compensation package holistically
- Connect with an MCS coach for advice
- Pay attention to your instincts

It is unlikely you will receive multiple offers at the exact same time, so you may need to ask the hiring manager for more time to deliberate their offer. Do not mention that you have received another offer as your reason for needing additional time, as it is unprofessional and indicates the employer is not your first choice.
Negotiating the Offer

People are often uncomfortable when it comes to negotiating salary and other benefits. To prepare yourself for the negotiation, understand your expectations: salary minimum, vacation/time-off minimums, etc. The more you know, the more confident you will be as you discuss the compensation.

When to Discuss Salary

During the interview, do not be the first to bring up salary; instead, let the interviewer be the first to discuss it. Once you receive an offer, you may begin engaging in negotiations but keep the following in mind:

Do Not...
- Be the first one to talk money
- Discuss salary before an offer is made
  - The employer may use this to screen out applicants from the candidate pool
- Tell the employer the minimum salary you need to support yourself/family
- Commit yourself to a specific number
  - Leave room to bargain by giving a salary range

Do...
- Calculate your anticipated living expenses
- Be reasonable in your approach
- Have a salary range in mind before negotiations begin
- Keep the discussion friendly and arrive at a mutually beneficial agreement
- Get your agreement in writing

Do Your Homework

It is very important that you gather information prior to interviewing and as you make a decision.
- Determine the typical salary range/average for the position/field you are considering (salary.com, glassdoor.com) and your major
- Recognize that salaries for the same type of job may vary with geographic location given cost of living differences
- Prepare sound rationale for your what you are asking; simply stating you think you should be earning more money is not sufficient
  - Understand your position: a graduate student will have more leeway in negotiating than an undergraduate who is seeking a first job

Accepting or Rejecting Offers

Once you have made your decision, you will need to either accept or reject your offer. Though rejecting an offer can feel awkward and uncomfortable, remember to remain professional and use tact in order to leave the door open for future opportunities.
Recommended Guidelines

- Ask the employer for a written confirmation once you have received an offer via telephone.
- Agree upon a decision-making time table with the employer; be true to your word and contact the employer at the agreed upon time.
- You may accept an offer over the telephone, but you may want to write an acceptance letter that states your appreciation and anticipation about starting your new position.
- You may turn down an offer over the telephone, but if you were impressed with the employer, you may want to send a letter declining the offer that states your appreciation and your positive view of the organization.
  - You MUST respond to ALL offers, even if you are choosing to decline them.
- Stop all interviewing after accepting an offer.
- **Do not renege** after accepting an offer; it is highly unethical and will undoubtedly damage your reputation with that employer/recruiter, starting your career off poorly.

Additional Resources

**The Riley Guide**

*Accept the Job Offer or Walk Away?* – Amy Gallo, Harvard Business Review Blog network

*How to Evaluate a Job Offer* – Alison Doyle, About.com

*Job-Offer Evaluation Checklist* – Paul W. Barada, Monster.com

*Rejection Letter: Declining a Job Offer* – Alison Doyle, About.com