



The Career Hacker's Guide To

Negotiating Job Offers



“Diplomacy is the art of letting someone else have your way.”

- Sir David Frost

Congrats! You got a job offer. Planning to negotiate? If so, this guide is for you.


Some people say you should always negotiate, even if you're happy with the offer. Others will advise you just take it, and don't get pushy. The truth?

There's no universal rule.

Negotiation is not bad or greedy, nor is it inherently good. The most important thing is to **know what you want** and be honest with yourself about it. And, of course, don't forget the good news: you nailed the job interview, and you got an offer! Don't lose sight of that as you seek to improve the terms.

Let's dive into the juicy details.

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When to negotiate, and when NOT to

Just because you can do something, doesn't mean you always should. There's a time and place for everything. Negotiate too soon, and you could jeopardize your chances at an offer. Negotiate too late, and they've moved forward with someone else. Here's how to figure out the right timing.

NEGOTIATE WHEN YOU HAVE AN OFFER LETTER

First, make sure you have an official job offer. As we wrote in our [guide to having successful job interviews](#), you need to know they are interested in you before you negotiate. Don't start listing off all your criteria until you have an offer! Focus on the value you can create instead.

Until you know for certain the company really wants you, it does no good to start talking about conditions or making demands. If the job description doesn't list the compensation or details you're looking for, focus on winning them over first.

Build social capital during the entire application and interview process. Show them your stuff and win them over. Only after you have an offer in hand do you negotiate some things you want.

Once you have that offer letter, if there's a little something else you want, and you'd regret it if you didn't at least try, then these next sections are for you.

NEVER NEGOTIATE JUST FOR THE SAKE OF NEGOTIATING

It's fine to accept a good offer without countering. If you don't feel the need to negotiate something specific, don't. Be careful not to turn an awesome opportunity into a stressful situation, just for the sake of negotiating!

Be honest with yourself about what you want—if the offer checks all the boxes, and negotiation would only add stress and complication, why waste the time and energy?

DON'T NEGOTIATE BETTER TERMS FOR A JOB YOU'D NEVER ACCEPT ANYWAY

This is rare, but I've seen people play hardball for a job they don't actually want, just for the thrill of “winning” the negotiation. That's bad faith. This kind of thing can follow you and harm your professional reputation, especially early in your career.



How to negotiate your job offer

Once you've got an official offer that you want to negotiate, it's time to roll up your sleeves! Here's how we recommend negotiating your job offer, backed by advice from experts.

RESPOND TO AN OFFER IMMEDIATELY, IF ONLY TO ASK FOR MORE TIME

If you get an offer letter while waiting to hear about other opportunities you may like better, what do you do? It's OK to ask for some time. But not too much.

You definitely want to respond to the offer promptly. For this, there is no such thing as "too soon." Let them know you are eager and grateful, and that you care, but you're not ready to pull the trigger just yet. Explain why (for example, having several things to consider; wanting to talk it over with someone; considering other offers in play) and ask for a little time to decide.

It's absolutely okay to do this—but you must commit to a specific timeframe within which you will get back to them with your answer. Don't just say, "I'll let you know in a while", or, "I need to talk to my career coach first," or "Can I have more time?" That's unclear! 😊

Instead, let them know you are excited, have a few things to think through, and will respond by Tuesday, or within 48 hours—something clear like that. If it's at all in your control, keep it to within 48 hours.

The only way it's okay to have an unclear timeline is if you're waiting on something that is naturally taking long time, and directly impacts your ability to accept the offer: for example, if your spouse's job might relocate you both to another country. Don't drag it out, just let them know, "We won't know until X happens."

And if you're wanting more options because you've applied to many places, know [when to stop seeking options and when to seize concrete opportunities](#). Don't make them wait more than a week. Even if they put up with it, you burn some social capital and start your new job with your boss wondering why you were so hesitant. Be quick if you can.

GET CLEAR ON THE ONE THING YOU VALUE MOST

If you've ever been on the market for a house or apartment, you know you will never get every single item on your wish list.

A good REALTOR will tell you to make your wish list, and then pick the absolute number one biggest priority. The one thing you simply

will not compromise on. You may think there are several no-compromise items, but there rarely are. You think big yard, screened in porch, and 3 bedrooms are must-haves. Until you see that 2 bedroom with a swimming pool in a neighborhood you love. 😊

It's like that with jobs. There's lots of stuff you value, and you'll get lots of it, but almost never all of it. It's unrealistic to try, and will only hurt your chances.

The good news is, things you believe are dealbreakers now are probably just rough ideas based on your current experience and limited knowledge. Especially early in your career, the things you think really matter (like what industry you work in or your title) really don't, and things you might not have considered turn out to be awesome (like tools you learn and people you work with).

So go ahead and make your list:

- Location
- Role type
- Schedule
- Compensation
- Benefits
- Advancement opportunities

Of course, stay realistic based on the company's way of doing business. If, for example, you absolutely want to work from home, but the entire company is based in-office, it might just not be in the cards.

All the stuff you want that is reasonably in range for your skill level. But force yourself to pick only ONE thing that would be absolutely non-negotiable—the one thing so important that, even if your absolute dream job didn't have it, you'd still walk away. And be flexible on the rest.

Make that the lead in your negotiation. Don't fret over a bunch of smaller little things. Nail the one big thing.

FIND YOUR "HAPPY PRICE"

This one is hard. It takes a lot of self awareness and self honesty.

Don't think about compensation in terms of numbers that impress others, or amounts you've heard your friends make. Think about [the price at which you would be happy to go to work every day](#). Aim for that.

You don't want to say "yes" to a certain pay rate, and then be unhappy about it every day you go to work. That's not good for you, and an unhappy employee is not good for the company.

For a job you really love that has all kinds of other benefits, it might be a surprisingly low price. I've met people who love their work so much they'd seriously consider doing it for free, if the company couldn't pay them anymore.

Other jobs aren't so inherently enjoyable. Some jobs you would never work unless they paid a lot more than your other options. I know people who don't love what they do at all, but they make better money than anywhere else—and they're happy that way.

Really think through what starting salary would be enough for you to be happy you said yes. Don't inflate it for ego, and don't deflate it for fear or doubt. Be honest about your “happy price.” Make that the fulcrum of your negotiation. You'll come off more genuinely and will be more likely to get paid what you'd like.

Oh, and “price” doesn't just mean money wages. It can mean any mix of compensation, benefits, equity, and other elements of the job—including the future upside.

BE CLEAR AND DIRECT WITH YOUR ASK

Once you get an offer you're excited about but want to ask for a little more, the ball is in your court. Make a clear counter.

Don't reply with vagaries like “Is there any way you could pay me more?” or “Can you be more flexible?” That puts all the work back on them to figure out what you want and what to do. Too much work for them—they'll just go with someone else.

Don't just throw a big bag of, “Can you give me something more?” Decide what you want, and make it clear.

Something clear and direct like this:

“Great, thank you! I’m really excited about this role. I had a salary range in mind of \$50k and your offer is \$40k. Could you do \$45k, with the goal to hit \$50k by the end of the year if my performance is above expectations?”

That’s clear, easy for them to respond to, and shows you’re playing fair. Pick the item(s) you care most about and ask for them. Schedule, benefits, pay, role, whatever it is, give a clear counter they can say “yes” or “no” to.

INVEST IN YOUR FUTURE SUCCESS

Robert Downey Jr. famously negotiated a percent of the Marvel movie profits instead of taking a larger up front payment. (You can be Iron Man too, even beyond negotiations!)

A great way to get more is to make it contingent on your ongoing per-

formance, like the example above.

“Could we start at \$45k, with the goal to hit \$50 by the end of the year if my performance deserves it?”

Take the initial offer, but counter with a caveat that you will get a pay increase in 6 months if you hit certain goals. Get the hiring



manager to agree to a certain time frame for compensation review, or specific criteria for bonuses or pay raises.

This is easier for them to say “yes” to than an immediate pay bump. [Companies are taking a risk by hiring you](#), and if you are willing to make the up-front risk lower in exchange for potentially higher upside on your end, it can be a win-win. And we always want win-wins. 😊

You can be more aggressive negotiating your future, assuming you prove to be a fit, than when you're an unknown new hire. Use that to your advantage.

You can also negotiate role and trajectory in this way. You can accept a role that might not be as challenging, or lacks the long-term growth, if it's what they need now—but try to get your new boss to agree to move you into a new role within a year, or allow you to spend 20% of your time in the marketing department as long as your customer success duties are fulfilled.

You can request job shadowing of roles you are interested in, or to be able to attend department meetings for a department you hope to transfer to. Not only does this improve your experience at the company, it also shows you're a curious, motivated person.

These kinds of concessions are often easier for your potential employer to say “yes” to, more valuable to you in the long run, and a great way to impress the hiring manager with your eagerness to learn and grow.



Caution: Avoid these when negotiating

Below are some of the common mistakes people tend to make when negotiating job offers. Learn from them, and avoid them at all costs!

NEVER BLUFF

Remember that stuff about the one most important thing and your “happy price”? Don’t lie about it—to them, or to yourself.

If you would happily accept the offer as-is, be careful about demanding more.

Think carefully about what you want. You can take a shot at asking for more, but if you’d take the job anyway, do it in such a way that doesn’t offend or come off too stringent. You don’t want to put yourself in a position to look bad or overreaching if they say “no” to your counter-offer, but you still want the job. Don’t lob stuff at them just for the sake of it. A counter-offer is backed by the implication that, if

they don't agree, you will walk away from the job. If you counter, you better be willing to walk away. It may not come to that, but it might.



Ask yourself; if they come back with “no,” how would you feel? Would you be embarrassed that you asked and wish you hadn't? If so, it's probably better not to ask. If you'd feel totally fine and not embarrassed to take the job anyway, go for it.

The best position for negotiation is total honesty. If you're not bluffing at all, but would only be happy with the job under the conditions you request, you're in a good spot. If they agree to your request, you win by getting a job you are happy with. If they say no, you win by avoiding a job you wouldn't be happy with.

DON'T SECOND-GUESS YOURSELF, OR REGRET NOT TRYING FOR MORE

Once the deal is done and you've accepted, don't rethink or second guess. (Really. It will only build resentment, making you less happy and worse at your job.)

Once you're in, go all in on the job and enjoy it. Don't spend mental energy on what could've been done differently, or wondering about

other jobs you applied to that might've come through. The most likely path to greater success and happiness is losing yourself in your new job and crushing it—not wondering about counterfactuals.

DON'T COMPARE YOUR PIE TO OTHERS

If you're happy with your job, don't concern yourself with others' pay or benefits or titles. There's always someone with a better deal than you. And always someone with a worse deal. Don't gloat your success or lament someone else's.

It will poison your work and distract you to no end. If envy gets in, it puts an ever-encroaching ceiling on your success and happiness. If you start to be happy about the failure of others instead of focusing on your own success; if you start to care more about what others think of your job instead of how you feel about it, beware.

In the words of the great Kevin Hart, and many others: “Do you.”



DON'T OPERATE FROM A PLACE OF EMOTION

This whole negotiation business doesn't come naturally to most of us. That's OK! Don't identify too closely with the process.

Don't assume someone denying your request is them saying they don't like you, or don't value you. Don't even assume the offers you get are an accurate reflection of your market value. Offers are a mix of many variables, and a best guess on the part of the hiring manager at what they think you will be able to produce within the context of their company, given the information they have about you.

You could be worth little to one company but a lot to another company with a different customer base or skillset needed. You could be worth a lot, but not have information on your pitch or resume that makes that clear.

Wages and benefits and work details are constantly in flux. It's an ongoing case study in free markets trying to discover the value you can create in various capacities. See it as play, exploration, and even a game. Don't take it personally. Don't beat yourself up or get mad at other people. Don't fight the war—play the game.

Get out there and seize opportunities! Each step further, you'll get better at knowing and commanding your value, on your own terms and by your own definition of what's valuable.

Final resources

Congrats on making it this far!

Subscribe to the Daily Job Hunt newsletter. Join 200,000+ readers and get a kick in the inbox every morning.

Read the Career Hackers Manifesto: The core principles of discovering and doing what makes you come alive.

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And check out the other career-hacking guides in this series:

