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Get Paid What You're Worth

By **John Keister**

[Editor's Note: The Salaries articles from this month and last are by the presenters of a program on negotiating salaries during the 2005 ALA Annual Conference. Each author presents valuable strategies that will help you raise our salaries individually and collectively.]

Congratulations! You feel like you just won the lottery - the new job you always wanted with a salary that exceeds what you hoped for. What? You're not happy with the salary? What happened during the negotiation? You did negotiate salary, didn't you?

We often focus our efforts on getting the interview and winning the job, but then drop the ball when it comes time to negotiate the salary. It is human nature to look at negotiation as some sort of "unpleasantness" to be avoided. This attitude is a mistake – and a costly one. Negotiation, as defined in the dictionary, is a "discussion aimed at reaching an agreement." Negotiation is not confrontation, but rather a meeting of the minds where the outcome is a "win-win" for all involved. However, successful negotiation requires planning and homework.

Most job seekers will accept or reject the first salary offer because they are afraid that negotiating will kill their chance to get the job. Salary negotiation can seem nerve-racking but it is part of the job-hunting process. We avoid negotiating because we don't know how to do it effectively. Chester Karrass, a noted expert on the art of negotiation, once said that "In business, you don't get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate."

Here are three major points to remember – 1) Interviewing and negotiating are all about building relationships, 2) Don't accept or reject a job until it is offered, and 3) Everything is negotiable. This doesn't mean you will get everything you ask for. Have goals in mind and know your deal breakers – those things that you just can't live without.

It all begins with *interviewing*. Turn every interview into an offer. Do your research on the library or organization. Know the challenges that need solutions. Be certain that you are the candidate who can address these challenges and solutions. This helps you stand apart from your competition. Express yourself clearly – a lack of clarity is worse than a lack of experience. Build relationships with everyone you meet, including the receptionist, because often decisions are heavily based on personal chemistry. Be certain that, if interested, you ask for the job. Do not leave doubt as to your interest. Do NOT bring up or discuss salary. Your goal is to eliminate your competition and make it difficult for them to reject you.

Now you have interviewed and have an *offer*. It is time to *negotiate*. You may think you are the only one scared, but the hiring organization is as well – of hiring the wrong person with the wrong terms. Employers know that people are the most important element in a successful organization. They try to get the best person for the lowest price. However, they do understand that they have to pay a quality price for a quality person. Their job is to make the best business deal. Your job is to have them recognize your quality and pay you the best price. Good negotiations are ones which both sides are happy with the outcome.

Here are several pitfalls that can happen during negotiation:

- Misunderstanding and miscommunication
- Lack of a serious approach by either party
- Unwillingness to listen
- Unwillingness to negotiate
- Unwillingness to walk away (do not be afraid to walk)

The outcome of the *negotiating process* should be satisfactory for all parties.

- Research what others are earning in your field. Know your goals and what you can/cannot do without.
- Do not go first. Get the hiring organization to go with a number.
- Negotiate base salary, then total compensation.
- Be certain that you are negotiating with the decision-maker.
- Suggest a salary range with an end figure above what you will settle for.
- In lieu of salary, negotiate changes in the job. Some examples are the timing of first review, bonus, memberships, relocation, vacation, and tuition reimbursement.
- Get everything in writing.

During negotiations, be honest, sincere, and patient. Negotiating is like a game of chess. Use a collaborative tone, do not get emotional, and do not be rigid. Talk about the job, not just the salary and benefits. Explain why you want something, with reasons that are appropriate for the position. Do not assume that employers will be moved by your personal situation (childcare, eldercare, student loans, etc.). Describe the situation as you see it, and then propose a solution.

Do your homework, eliminate your competition in the interview, get the offer, and approach salary negotiating as a “win-win” for all involved. It's not quite as exciting as winning the lottery, but it's a pretty good feeling.

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