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Salary Negotiation -- 3 Tips for Fair Pay

With these savvy salary pointers, you, too, can come out on top

By KRISTINA COWAN, SENIOR WRITER, Payscale.com

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Salary negotiations can be the most dreaded part of any job -- new or old.

But having the right approach can make the process much easier and less frightening.

Whatever the circumstances, experts say there are principles employees must follow for successful salary negotiation: being prepared, reasonable and confident. Likewise, they say, there are common barriers to successful salary negotiation, including closed-mindedness and poor communication skills. Read on for more expert salary negotiation tips.

1. Always Be Prepared to Negotiate

Being prepared is one of the key ingredients to a successful salary negotiation, according to experts.

Kevin Nussbaum, president of the Human Capital Services division at CBIZ, a business services firm, said knowing your fair market value is one way of being prepared.

"Everyone expects to be paid fair market value, and it's always important to know what fair market value is; sometimes you have to force the issue," he said. "It's always better to negotiate salary from a position of strength with your data."

Nussbaum pointed out that the "pay mix is moving more to variable pay"-such as bonuses, preferred compensation or options. "There is less appetite among employers to just increase the base salary," he said.

Francie Dalton, president of Dalton Alliances Inc., a business consulting firm based in Columbia, Md., agreed salary negotiation preparation is vital, including research on a company that reveals its needs, strengths and weaknesses.

Dalton said employees or job seekers must also be reasonable.

"If you don't have justifications for what you are asking; if you can't answer why you're worth something, you won't be successful in salary negotiations," she explained. "You need to be clear and fluent in why you deserve what you're asking for without sounding defensive."

Talking salary makes most people uncomfortable, she said, so embracing such talks often suggests confidence and establishes respect.

"Those who are comfortable stand out as being more confident, as having more self-esteem because they're willing to address an issue most aren't willing to. Most are willing to take what they get and are hesitant to be their own advocate," she said.

2. Don't Get Discouraged

Besides knowing what to do, it's also useful to know what to avoid when it comes to salary negotiations, experts say.

Salary negotiation expert Laura DeCarlo says an applicant shouldn't head for the hills if an employer doesn't immediately meet his or her expectations.

"That approach is closing the door when you could've persuasively convinced them you were the right one for the job and they would have worked to get you in. For the right candidate, companies will sometimes move mountains," DeCarlo said.

Dalton said poor communication skills can be a death knell.

"You can be brilliant, but if your delivery is poor that works against you. ... How you carry yourself, elocution, grammar ... all those things matter," Dalton said.

3. Consider Negotiation Before Accepting a Job Offer

After you receive a job offer, there is typically a lot of room to negotiate salary and benefits. Remember salary negotiation after a job offer is the best time to take control of the situation. Once you have accepted the job offer, your chances to renegotiate are typically tied to performance reviews.

With great confidence, preparation, and even some charm, salary negotiation can net optimal results.

Kristina Cowan is the senior writer for the AOL Salary Center and PayScale.com. She has over 10 years of journalism experience, specializing in education and workforce issues.

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