

Accepting Job Offers

You have been diligently conducting your job search campaign sending out cover letters and resumes, networking, keeping records, interviewing, and following-up and now your efforts have paid off; an employer representative has called and offered you a position (a job!!!!). The offer is what all this work is about, but don't leap to accept until you have evaluated the pros and cons. The best policy is not to accept an offer right away even if you are fairly certain you want the job. Give yourself a couple of days to think it through carefully.

There are many considerations to be made when deciding either to accept or reject a job offer. Possible criteria can be grouped into five main categories: the job or position, the organization, geography, salary/benefits, people relationships, and personal. The importance of each category and of the items it covers will, of course, depend on your individual interests, values, and particular situation.

The job may not be perfect. All your needs and values may not be met, but are your most important ones being filled? If you are uncertain about your priorities, go back and do some self-assessment exercises to clarify your own thinking. If you are unsure about whether the job would be a good move even though you like it, check with others in the field.

Don't be overcome by the excitement surrounding a job offer and all the changes in your life that it represents. There is a tendency to overlook some of the not-so-pleasant aspects of a job simply because you have "finally received a job offer!" Before making your decision, talk to trusted friends who know you or meet with a counselor in the Career Center to discuss it. You have the power and the information to make a good decision. Remember, this is not a life or death choice or one which remains permanently cast in cement. Hopefully, the job you choose will represent a logical step in your own career aspirations.

Guidelines In Accepting Or Rejecting An Offer - If you have questions on any aspect of the offer or the job, clarify them before accepting. If you receive an offer you want to consider, acknowledge the offer immediately, indicating when your decision can be expected. Employers should allow you reasonable time to consider your decision. By the same token, if you have received an offer from Company A, but would prefer an offer from Company B, you can write or call Company B informing them another company has extended an offer but that you are still interested in Company B and would like to know your status with them. Be considerate of employer needs in requesting time extensions.

Accept in writing, restating important facts (salary, starting date, title, etc.). If you get an offer, you're not really interested in accepting, you should say so immediately in writing. Don't be forced by lack of an alternative to accept a job you don't really want unless it offers the flexibility to continue your job hunt.

Inform all other organizations with whom you have been dealing of your acceptance of a job. You will want to remain on friendly terms with these organizations; you may consider employment with them at some time in the future or do business with them in your new job.

Notify the Career Center about your decision. We love to hear about happy endings and success stories!

Write thank-you notes to anyone who was especially helpful in your job search (references, counselors, friends, faculty).

Keep track of your direct job-hunting expenses, such as agency fees, travel, postage, and resume printing. Many of these expenses are tax deductible.

And Finally--Treat yourself to a celebration! You have found a job! You will be immersed in your job soon enough, so for now, kick back, relax and enjoy the moment. Congratulations!

Continued Career Planning - As soon as you have accepted a job offer, your active job search campaign will end. Your career will not end with your first job, however, and you will not want to stop your personal career planning. You will want to build a career path for yourself and to plan your career progression.

No matter how content you are in your first (and any subsequent) job, it is important to keep your resume up to date. Each time you take on a new responsibility or help make an important decision, keep a record for use in updating your resume. Your resume file and updated resume will assist you in making a self-assessment every year or two. This self-assessment is necessary in determining whether or not you are following your career plan and/or in deciding what aspects of your plan need to be changed as you have changed.

Evaluating Job Offers - The factors used in evaluating and comparing job offers can be integrated into various rating forms as those which follow. Depending upon your career objective, you may want to either add or change some of the criteria included in the check lists. Since we each value job aspects in different fashions and levels of importance, the different formats and rating systems will provide different perspectives on the job choice.

Work Satisfaction Check List - Directions: Consider each of the job offers you now have in terms of the work satisfaction it offers. Answer yes or no to each of the questions below for each of your offers. It is understood that you don't know everything about the position or organization, but take your best guess.

Criteria:

1. Will I enjoy working with my future co-workers and supervisors?
2. Will I have a good opportunity to express myself on the job?
3. Is the working environment satisfactory?
4. Will I be fully using my primary skills?
5. Is there sufficient diversity and challenge?
6. Will I be able to get the kind of feedback I require to actually see the results of my efforts?
7. Is there an opportunity to learn and expand?
8. Is the commute to and from work within satisfactory limits?
9. Are there open avenues of communication?
10. Will I be able to dress comfortably?
11. Will I be able to get value from my work to the extent that I make a contribution?
12. Am I motivated and satisfied with the ultimate purpose of the organization?
13. In terms of work pleasure, is this opportunity close to any of my "dream jobs?"
14. Do I really want to do this kind of work?
15. Is the salary and benefit package satisfactory?

Additional Criteria:

Developing A Budget - To effectively evaluate a job offer, you will also need to examine your financial situation. Will the salary and benefits meet your financial needs? Use the list below to help construct an overall budget. Be realistic!

| <u>Item</u> | <u>Estimated Monthly Expense</u> |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Mortgage Payment or | _____ |
| Apartment Rent | _____ |
| Home or Apartment | _____ |
| Insurance | _____ |
| Gas (utilities) | _____ |
| Electric (utilities) | _____ |
| Water (utilities) | _____ |
| Telephone | _____ |
| Student Loan Payment | _____ |
| Car Payment | _____ |
| Car Insurance | _____ |
| Gasoline | _____ |
| Car Maintenance | _____ |
| Food | _____ |
| Clothing | _____ |
| Drugs/Medical Expenses | _____ |
| Child Care | _____ |
| Tuition Expenses | _____ |
| Subscriptions, Magazines | _____ |
| Household Needs | _____ |
| Life Insurance Premiums* | _____ |
| Medical Insurance | _____ |
| Premiums* | _____ |
| Laundry and Dry | _____ |
| Cleaning | _____ |
| Taxes | _____ |
| Club and Association | _____ |
| Memberships | _____ |
| Entertainment | _____ |
| Other: | _____ |
| Other: | _____ |
| Other: | _____ |

Total monthly expenses
x 12 months: _____

***May be part of your**
benefits package

Benefits Package

When evaluating a job offer, benefits are an important part of the compensation package and should be carefully reviewed.

Health Insurance Coverage - Most employers offer two or three options for Health coverage and this is the most expensive benefit. The employer pays part of the premium and the employee the remainder. The stronger plans also include dental and vision coverage. Three of the most common options are:

- **HMO (Health Maintenance Organization):** Under this plan the employee selects a physician from a list specified by the insurer. The physician serves as a gatekeeper and refers patients to certain specialists. In an HMO there is no deductible and you pay small co-payments for each visit. An HMO is the least expensive to you, but is a controlled system.
- **PPO (Preferred Provider Organization):** Under this plan a group of doctors, hospitals and pharmacies are contracted at a higher discount than traditional health insurance. Under this plan, often/times you are allowed to select your own physician. There is usually an annual deductible, you might pay a percentage of certain expenses, and there might be other co-payments involved.
- **Traditional Health Insurance:** Under this plan you have total freedom of choice of doctors and hospitals. The insurance covers 70-80% of the expenses and there is a deductible. This is the most expensive coverage.

Pension Plan - Under a pension plan an employer contributes a portion of your salary and you contribute a portion of your salary in pre-tax dollars. These dollars are invested in real estate, bonds, stocks and money market accounts to provide an annuity for your retirement. It is important to understand how a company handles the money invested in a pension plan if you leave the organization.

Group Life Insurance - A life insurance plan provides a payment to your beneficiary if you die or are seriously disabled while in the employment of the organization. This is usually based on a formula of your salary. Group life insurance is to replace the loss of your wages for several years to your beneficiary. Group life rates are age rated and are lower for younger people.

Short-Term And Long-Term Disability - If you become permanently disabled and are not able to work, long-term disability provides you a percentage of your salary to age 65. In most cases, long term disability starts six months after you become disabled. Short-term disability replaces the loss of salary for serious illnesses that last up to six months.

Educational Benefits - Some employers will reimburse employees for the costs of taking courses at local colleges. After you have been employed at a company you may want to continue your education and take graduate courses. With the escalating costs of tuition, this can be a very valuable benefit.

Childcare - With both members of a family working outside the home, there is a need to find quality care for children during the day. Child care may include a company-operated center, a discount with a local provider, or a reimbursement for direct costs.

Other Benefits: Vacation Time, Flex Time, Employee Discounts, Profit Share Plans, Relocation Programs, Sick Time, Recreational Programs, Maternity/Parental Leave, Cafeteria Benefit Plans

Salary Negotiation

Another major consideration in the evaluation process will be your salary. Remember, you CAN negotiate salary after an offer has been made. Here are some salary negotiation tips:

Before the Interview:

- Research the job market and learn the salary range for the types of jobs for which you will be interviewing.
- Determine your "bottom line." At some point your bottom line will be tested. An employer will offer you a salary that is below this amount. You need to know "how low you can go."
- Salary is often based upon value and your ability to produce. You will need to know your market value.
- Often, you will be asked about your salary requirements in the initial stages of the job interview process, perhaps even in the letter of application. Having done your homework, you may provide the employer with your salary range. Do not give one specific amount. However, you may avoid naming figures at all before an offer has been made by stating that you are open for negotiation should you be offered the job.
- You do not need to provide your salary history in your application even if it is requested.
- You may inquire at the initial interview about the salary range for the position.

The Actual Negotiation Process:

DO NOT negotiate salary until a job offer has been made.

- Once the job offer is on the table, salary negotiation takes place to determine a salary and benefit package that both sides will be able to live with. It does not have to be an adversarial relation and should be a cordial discussion. The job offer will remain on the table regardless of what you express in the negotiation.
- Negotiation involves compromise. It is a "win/win" situation.

First, determine the need to negotiate.

- Evaluate any offer which is made. If you've done your research, you will know whether or not it is a fair offer.

Negotiate on the basis of your qualifications; your education, experience, skills, and capabilities in relation to their worth in the job market, NOT on the basis of your wants or needs.

- The more education and experience you have in your field the stronger your negotiating position will be. If you are career changing, you may lose some of your bargaining power in the process. You will need to draw attention to the transferability of your skills.
- Don't discuss your problems, financial or otherwise. Employers do not want to hear about your student loans and other personal matters. The discussion should be based on qualifications and performance.

Some salary scales are non-negotiable, especially in the non-profit and public sectors.

- Non-negotiable salaries are rare in the profit sector, but they are also rare at upper levels in any sector. Where your current or most recent salary exceeds the top of the posted range, you may be able to negotiate above the range.

When asked to name a figure, you might be asked to give your last salary.

- If you were inadequately compensated or feel that you now deserve a somewhat higher rate, state the figure but give sound arguments about how the new job responsibilities are more demanding, how you have acquired new skills or credentials, and why you should not be penalized for past underpayment.
- Hold your ground if a certain salary level is important to you.
- Sometimes waiting out the silence is your best ploy. Be ready to give your arguments. In many cases the person making the offer does not have the authority to offer more, but needs to go to a superior. Ask them to do so.

If you cannot get the salary you want, ask when you can be reviewed again, or try for other non-fixed benefits (memberships, a few extra days off).

If the employer completely balks at the figure you name, ask what he/she had in mind. You may have been way off base.

Once the final figure has been reached, you will need time to make your decision.

- In all negotiations, the time will come for the "final offer" to be made and for you to make a decision to accept or decline. Ask them how much time you have for your decision. Sometimes you can ask for as much as two weeks and in other situations you might only have a day or two.
- The "final offer" should come from the employer, not you. It is your role to find areas of mutual agreement.

Do not accept a job offer with the idea that if a better job offer comes along, you will just "back out" on the first offer.

- It is very risky to give your word to an employer and then cancel out at the last minute. "What goes around, comes around" is often true, and this action could come back to haunt you later on down the road. Your word should be good for something, and your reputation in the community is at stake.

Make your acceptance or decline of the job offer by telephone conversation but ask for written confirmation.

- It is standard practice to formalize an acceptance of a job offer verbally. However, it is highly recommended to always get a written confirmation of the job offer which spells out job title, starting date, and salary information, etc. In most cases, this written confirmation can be a legally binding document. Therefore, be sure it is the job you want before "signing on the dotted line."

Some organizations require the signing of a contract. Read through everything, including the fine print, before signing. Make copies for your files.

Once you have accepted a job offer, write to those employers who are still considering your application and inform them that you are withdrawing.

Grading Your Job Offer

In the spaces to the right, rate each criteria factor on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the highest score and 1 being the lowest. At the bottom of each column add your score to determine your job offer grade.

| Criteria | Terrific =5 | Very Good =4 | Good =3 | Average =2 | Not Good =1 |
|-------------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------|---------------|----------------|
| Type of Work | | | | | |
| Responsibility | | | | | |
| Chance for advancement | | | | | |
| Fellow Workers | | | | | |
| Supervisor | | | | | |
| Training | | | | | |
| Pay | | | | | |
| Working conditions | | | | | |
| Travel | | | | | |
| Expenses | | | | | |
| Performance appraisal | | | | | |
| Growth | | | | | |
| Reputation | | | | | |
| Location | | | | | |
| Fringe Benefits | | | | | |
| My Gut Feeling | | | | | |
| Other people's feelings | | | | | |
| Other: | | | | | |

Totals:

Grand Total:

Grading System

81-90 – The job of a lifetime! Don't hesitate; accept immediately. A chance like this might not come again!

61-80 – A very fine job offer. Better than most can hope to get.

41-60 – A pretty good offer. It would be ok to do this work for a year or two and then move on.

21-40 – Borderline job offer. If you have been job hunting for a long time and just want to work, then take it.

0-20 – Forget it. You'd be better off doing temp work.