

Evaluating a Job Offer

When you accept a job offer and start in a new role, it's too late, then, to turn back!

Does it Meet Your Criteria?

The best approach is to *decide whether you want the job before an offer is extended.*

In other words, you need to set some criteria for your new role. This allows you to clarify whether a particular job suits your needs. Unless you're motivated solely by money, it's doubtful a few extra dollars will turn a bad job into a good one.

The time to start any serious evaluation of a potential new job is after you have been to the first job interview. The full details of the job often do not become clear until then.

After the interview, you need to decide whether the new position *is right for you.* Ask yourself the following:

- Does the new job meet the criteria you set out when you first began your search?
- Will the new job improve your level of personal and professional satisfaction?
- Or will it simply offer you a rehash of what you already have?

If your new-found understanding of the job does not meet with your originally stated requirements, don't hesitate to drop it. Your future happiness (or frustration) may depend on being firm in your decision here.

If, however, you now know that the job is, indeed, one you would enjoy, the next step is to look at the specifics of the offer.

The Economic Factor

Compensation, of course, will be a key factor in your decision whether to accept a new position.

If you're looking at an opportunity that's in a different geographic location, for instance, you might want to do some investigating before you even interview. For example, if you live in a nice suburban community in Adelaide, what would it cost you to maintain your current lifestyle in an area like Sydney? Your answer (and your willingness to make the necessary trade-offs) will help determine your level of interest when considering the new position.

Figuring the Bottom Line

If the job interests you, then determine the conditions under which you'll accept. These fall into two categories: the "Bottom-Line" and "Porcupine".

The term "bottom-line" refers to the amount of compensation you feel is absolutely necessary in order to accept the job offer. If, for example, you really want \$56,000 but would think about \$55,000 or settle for \$54,000, then you haven't established your bottom line. *The bottom-line is the figure, below which, you would positively walk away from.* Setting a bottom line clarifies your sense of worth and helps avoid an unpredictable bargaining session.

It's not a good idea to "negotiate" an offer in the classic sense, where the company makes a proposal, you counter it, they counter your counter, and so on. While this type of tit for tat format may be customary for negotiating a residential real estate deal, job offers should be handled in a more straightforward manner.



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Here's How: Determine your bottom-line in advance and wait for the offer. If the company offers you more than your bottom-line, that's great. If they offer you less, then you have the option of turning the offer down, or revealing to them your bottom-line as a condition of acceptance. At that point, they can raise the ante or walk away.

Lay Your Cards on the Table

It's much better to lay your cards on the table in the beginning than to barter to get what you want. An employer can get very irritable when a candidate says, "I'll think it over," or if they keep coming back with new demands again and again. Even if you get what you want, you've created a negative impression with the company that will carry over after you've been hired. In effect, you may win the battle, but lose the war.



You may want to itemise your bottom-line and, if it's appropriate, show it to the company (or your recruiter) as a means to justify your salary request. Carefully figure your total package and document your requirements for base salary or wages, overtime and call-out fees (if applicable), car expenses, fuel cards and the like.

If a recruiter asks for your bottom-line, he or she isn't trying to manipulate you or conspire with an employer that plans to "lowball" its candidates. The recruiter is simply making a good faith effort to discover what makes you happy and put two interested parties together who can agree.

The Porcupine Category

Of course, there are considerations aside from money that usually need to be satisfied before an offer can be accepted. Factors such as your new position title, review periods, work schedule and promotion opportunities are important. These, too, should be looked at carefully.

The "porcupine approach" is used to quantify each consideration or "point" that you feel is important as a condition for acceptance. Professional recruiters will use this approach to understand each point. They can then work with the company to put the deal together, without having to go back to you later to get "one more thing."

Once you know your bottom-line and each condition, or point on the porcupine, you're in a better position to get what you want, since you've established quantifiable goals to shoot for.

How an Offer Is Staged

Every company makes hiring decisions differently. Some will encourage shoot-from-the-hip managers to make job offers on the spot. Other companies will limit the decision maker's ability to act quickly and unilaterally, and require a drawn-out series of staff meetings, subsequent interviews, corporate signatures, and so on.

Offers can be extended by either a letter, or verbally from a hiring manager. They can also be made through a third party, such as a recruiter. In either case, be careful. An offer needs to include the following components before it can be considered official:

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1. **Your position title.**
2. **Your starting date.**
3. **Full details of salary or wages, including overtime, call-out fees, etc.**
4. **Full details of car expenses/fuel cards etc.**
5. **Specific agreements regarding compensation increases based on future reviews.**

Before you resign from your present job, make sure you nail down each of these components *in writing*, in the form of an offer letter.

As an example, it has happened that a candidate accepted an offer, assuming he was on a wage, including overtime and call-out fees. When he started the job, he found he was on a salary, not a wage, so no overtime or additional fees were involved.

There was also the case of a Technician who was told there was a company car and fuel card. He asked if he could have a Car Allowance instead, and they agreed. The only trouble was that when he started, he found that a Car Allowance did not come with a fuel card!

All of these details need to be explicit in the letter of offer. If it's not written, you have no recourse.

Accepting the Offer

It often happens that you may be applying for several positions at the same time. Be careful here not to fall into the trap of playing one off against the other. As you go through the initial interviews, gaining a fuller understanding of each offer, line them up and give each of them a rating. Remember

to rule out the ones that do not meet your base criteria. Rate the rest according to which job you would most like to win.

You may need to wait until you have clarified all of the details of each of the jobs on your short-list. But, when you have them all, now is the time to evaluate the relative benefits of each.

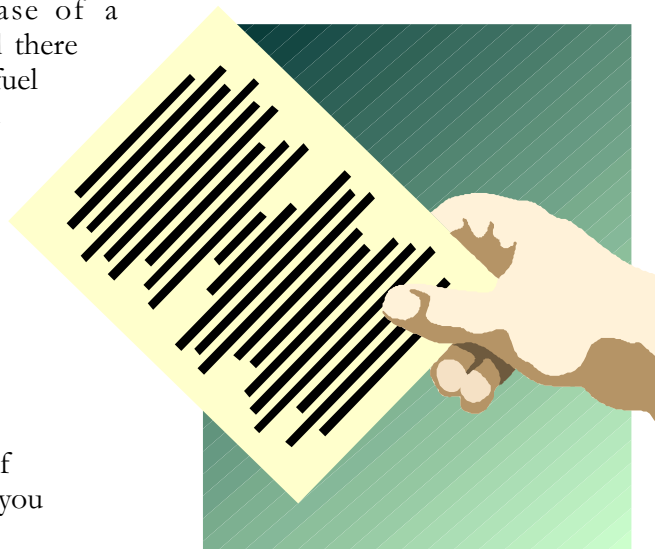
Once all the offers are on the table, it makes common sense to accept or reject them within a day or so. Otherwise, your inability to commit will reflect poorly on the way you make decisions; or it will telegraph your lack of enthusiasm to the new employer. In either case, you're likely to be bruised by waiting too long.

So, when the one on top of the list meets all your criteria and the offer is clearly defined and acceptable, *go ahead and accept it*. Now, when you make that decision, make it final. Immediately

wipe the others from any further consideration. As a matter of courtesy, you should contact the others to let them know you are no longer in the running for their job. And steel yourself against listening to any counter-offers at this point. *You've made your decision - stick to it!*

If you have legitimate concerns, or you still have questions that need to be answered, be sure to bring them up. Rather than tell the employer, "I'll have to think it over," use the following script:

"Mr. Employer, this job looks very good to me and I'm enthusiastic about coming to work for your company. I'll be in a position to



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accept your offer if I can just clarify a couple of things...”

The answers you get to your “couple of things” will help to make your decision for you. If you decide to reject an offer, remember that it’s almost impossible to resurrect the deal at a later date, since the position will be offered to someone else, or the employer will feel insulted and close the door on your candidacy. Whatever you do, ***make certain your decision is final.***

New Angles and Unusual Deals

Money can present a problem for employers when your salary requirements exceed the published range for the position, or create an inequity within their department. In fact, internal equity issues (in which your expected salary might be greater than someone on the staff who has more professional or company seniority) are the cause of most deals that fail to close for financial reasons.

To satisfy money matters, look for ways to increase your overall yearly compensation, rather than your base salary. Here are a couple of goodies you can shoot for to boost your earnings without ruffling too many feathers:

- **A performance bonus to be paid after thirty, sixty, or ninety days, assuming your clearly defined goals are met.**
- **An accelerated review which would occur after three or six months, rather than on your first anniversary of employment, in which your salary would be increased.**

When required, companies will sometimes serve up these tasty morsels to hungry candidates who recognise that overall compensation consists of more than salary alone.

Careful evaluation mixed with a little bit of creativity will help you get the deal you want.

