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Five Ways to Negotiate a Better Job Offer ... Despite the Economy

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Lee E. Miller, author "Get More Money on Your Next Job... In Any Economy"

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In the early 1980s the country was in the midst of a major recession as bad as the one we are currently experiencing. Unemployment was in the double digits and so was inflation. Yet I was able to negotiate a 50 percent salary increase when I took a job with a new firm in Washington, D.C.

Although I would like to be able to say my success was due to my extraordinary skill as a negotiator, it wasn't. I was still in my 20s at the time; this was the first time I ever really had to negotiate my compensation and, in hindsight, I made a lot of mistakes. The things I did do right though, were to negotiate with the right employer at the right time, and convince them that I was the right candidate for the job. Then and only then did we seriously talk about money.

In a tough economy most individuals don't think they have the ability to negotiate salary. Regardless of the state of the economy, if you are able to get a job offer you probably are in a better position to

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negotiate than you think.

When it comes to negotiating, as in every aspect of your life, you limit yourself by what you think you can do. If someone wants to hire you, it is because you offer something they value. As a result, you are in a position to negotiate for additional money, benefits and opportunities. There are, however, right and wrong ways to go about it. Here are five tips to help you negotiate when the job market is weak.

1. Take the time to learn how to negotiate.

Like math and good [writing](#), negotiating skills have to be learned. Take a class, attend a seminar or read a book on the topic. The ability to negotiate effectively will help you throughout your working career, not only when you are discussing compensation.

Every day at work you negotiate about deadlines, to get resources, about time off and to get assignments that will propel your career forward and enable to earn more money. Ultimately your career success depends on your ability to effectively negotiate. Time spent learning how to hammer out a deal is time well spent, and will pay dividends throughout your career.

2. Get a potential employer to "fall in love" with you before you talk about money.

The time to be asking for things is after an employer has decided to hire you. Focus on what is important to the employer and what you can do for them. In tough times, making or saving money is always important. So is your ability to make your prospective boss look good.

Employers want to hire people who bring value, and they are willing to pay what is necessary to hire them. Once the employer has decided to make you an offer, then, and only then, should you start discussing the terms of employment. Until that time, whenever the subject of money comes up, talk about the job. Be enthusiastic about wanting the job. Show that you really want to work there. Ask for the job. No one wants to hire a person who is only looking for a paycheck.

If asked what you are looking for in terms of compensation, say something like "I am sure that if I am the right person for the job and the job is right for me, something that is fair will be readily worked out." Then ask some questions about the job. You will look good to the employer and defer the conversation until a time that is more appropriate.

3. The only difference between being employed and being unemployed is your self-confidence.

You are same person when you are unemployed as you were when you were working. You have the same skills and same experience. The value you can bring to an employer doesn't change just because you don't have a job. The only difference is your confidence. If you exhibit confidence you not only can negotiate effectively, you probably can land the job you want.

Competition for your services will also make you seem more valuable in the eyes of a prospective employer. Talking with several prospective employers at the same time will not only increase your confidence but will enhance your bargaining leverage.

4. Don't act like you are negotiating.

While you want to arrange the best possible deal, you should do so in a way that doesn't look like you are negotiating. Remember, once the employer has decided to offer you a job, they are trying to recruit you. Let them. Tell them what your concerns are. Ask for the things you want without ever suggesting that you won't accept the job if you don't get them. "Would it be possible..." or "Could you..." or "Other companies I have been talking to have offered, is it possible..." are non-threatening ways for you to ask. Don't make "demands." Throughout the process, and especially when you are asking for something, let the employer know how excited you are about the opportunity and how much you want the job.

5. Negotiating is not only about salary.

Understand how a prospective employer structures its compensation, and seek what is easiest for an employer to give. For some employers that is salary; for others it is bonuses or equity. Often,

particularly early in your career, the most important thing that you can negotiate is the chance to learn new skills. When you learn new skills it will enable you to get better jobs and negotiate more money.

You can arrange what projects you will be assigned to, who you will be working with and what training you will receive. Asking for the opportunity to attend seminars and receive additional training is usually looked on favorably by employers. If the company doesn't have a formal tuition-reimbursement program, sometimes you can get the company to agree to pay for additional formal education.

Regardless of the state of the economy, most employers are not trying to hire based solely on whom they can get for least amount of money. They are seeking individuals that add real value, especially in a tough business environment. If you have demonstrated your worth sufficiently that an employer wants to hire you, you are in a good position to negotiate your compensation.

Most employers want to be seen as being fair, and want you not only to accept the position but also to feel good about doing so. Within the constraints of their budgets and organizational structures, employers usually will agree to any request that seems fair and reasonable. So being able to give a rationale for what you are asking for that will resonate with your prospective employer will make it more likely they will agree to give it to you. Asking for things that will help you in your work but which you would otherwise probably buy for yourself anyway, like certain computer equipment and software or an iPhone, is generally a fairly easy sell.

Understanding these principles will allow you to effectively negotiate the best possible terms in your next job regardless of the state of the economy. Once you are hired, do a good job and continually seek out new challenges. As you take on added responsibilities and learn new skills, there will be opportunities to negotiate further improvements.

A veteran human resources executive, Lee E. Miller is a career coach and he co-founder of YourCareerDoctors.com. He is also the author of "Get More Money on Your Next Job... In Any Economy"

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