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Career Coach: The Perils of Renegotiating an Offer Letter

By Andrew Greene March 21, 2016

Once you've gone through the dance of interviews and discussing salary and benefits expectations and reach the offer letter stage, can you still negotiate? Should you? *Responses have been edited for clarity and concision.*



Julia Harris Wexler

Julia Harris Wexler is a New York City–based career coach.

The channels of command and the chain that has to approve an offer letter throughout HR are usually not short. So, by the time you get a commitment in terms of an offer letter, to then to go and change that by adding to it is onerous, time consuming and frankly a waste of energy from the organization to the employee.

All benefits and salary are supposed to be discussed in a dialogue. It's supposed to be a conversation. You can't expect an organization to go back and tweak an offer letter five or 10 more times based on parking spots and vacation. That's bad form.

The only reason to have an offer letter is so that the candidate is comfortable resigning from their organization. They know they have a solid, hard-copy offer letter. That letter should not go out until terms are agreed upon because, from the organization's side, that employee can use that offer letter as a hard, factual reason to negotiate for more money from their current organization.

Any kind of boomerang going back after a letter is not going to bode well for the candidate. Impressions are formed quickly and they are very hard to shake once people think you are a little squirrely and trying to get perhaps more than you should have.

[Candidates] may get in the short term what they need, but it's truly not a good way to begin. You really do not want to walk into an organization and have the people that went to bat for you, that got you hired, maybe got you some more money or a larger title, feel that you kind of took advantage or they look bad in the eyes of the people around them. It's just not a good thing to do.



Brian Drum is founder and president of Drum Associates, an executive recruiting firm in New York City.

Sometimes people will negotiate on their own and basically have the deal fail because they've asked for too much or they've asked for something that just doesn't fit in with the company in terms of their culture or how they do business.

The candidate has a view and the company has a view. In everybody's best interests, you want those alignments to work as best they can so everyone walks away with a smile on their face.

So there's a lot that can be done beforehand. Candidates can ask things like, "How do you deal with work/life balance? How do you deal with the remote workplace?"

There are all sorts of benefits that are somewhat negotiable beyond the salary. It can be ... paid time off, which could be an extended vacation schedule.

You can ask for anything, but the risk you run is that the deal may fall apart.

In most cases, you do get what you expected and sometimes the offer is much less than what you expected. And at that point I think you should speak up. It's a question of what you define as what your good deal is.

Most employers want someone to come into a job reasonably happy and positive.

[I]f it's something you feel is low and you would like more, you can say something like, "I'm a little disappointed in the offer. I would certainly be happier if I was paid X," and then you come up with a number.

Unless your renegotiation is so out of whack with where they want to be, chances are they may tell you they can't do anything more and they appreciate that you're not thrilled with it, but the offer is as far as they can go. And then you'll know.



Bill McGinnis

Bill McGinnis is a career consultant with Milwaukee, Wis.-based Exponential Careers and a former portfolio manager with Capital Investment Services of America.

It's best to negotiate before you get an offer letter. By the time they've gotten to a letter, that's fairly formal in the whole process.

If they've asked you up front what is your target salary is and you've given them that number and they tell you how much vacation they give typically and you respond that it sounds fair and if what they're giving you is pretty much what you asked for, you really shouldn't be going back and asking for more.

Normally there's a verbal discussion of the salary and benefits. Often you can negotiate from that point. In some organizations they'll say something like, "We don't know all of the benefits details. That will come in a packet with the offer letter." Then you're forced to wait for that.

If there's been a verbal communication of what salary and benefits are going to look like and an indication on the employee's side that that's acceptable, it looks badly if when the formal offer letter comes suddenly they start waffling. And that's what it looks like. It's waffling.

Now, if you're going to wait that long, when you get the verbal suggestion of what the package might be, the thing to be sure to do is to say, "I'm really pleased to get that. Before making a decision I'd really like to see everything in writing so I understand exactly what this package looks like."

It's a problem when you go to someone and say, "I'd really like to work for you, but XYZ company is willing to pay me \$20,000 more." That's not my problem as the employer, and now you're just using me as negotiating bait against somebody else. And so I'm not really all that sure that this person is all that committed to working at this company.

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