

Negotiation Tips for Recent Graduates

Even in today's challenging economy, there may be room to do some negotiating on a job offer. But discussing compensation with a hiring manager can be tricky. If you're a recent graduate who's never negotiated with an employer before, it can help to know the places others before you have tripped up. Here are some common mistakes and tips for avoiding them:

You haven't done your homework. Arm yourself with information before heading to the negotiating table. Review publications such as Robert Half's *Salary Guide* and the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* from the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics to make sure the salary you request falls reasonably within the range for the role you're being offered. You don't want to overplay your hand by demanding compensation far above the going rate in your geographic area.

You display the wrong attitude. Negotiations with an employer should be serious but friendly. After all, you're not haggling with a car salesperson you'll never see again. Some applicants feel that attempting to come across as hard-nosed and tough makes them appear to be a wiser and more sophisticated candidate. In fact, the opposite is true. You won't do yourself any favors by acting entitled or issuing ultimatums. Taking an even slightly adversarial tone or threatening to "walk away" if your demands aren't met is an ill-advised strategy. Instead, be poised, pleasant and appreciative.

You don't know when to quit. If you've gone back and forth with the hiring manager in regard to salary, benefits and vacation time and he or she has met all of your requests, don't continue pushing for more just to see what else you can get. Candidates shoot themselves in the foot when they overestimate the leverage they have or an employer's willingness to play games.

Finally, just as a white lie on your resume can come back to haunt you during a reference check, don't claim to have an offer from a competing firm if you don't. More than a few job seekers have had their bluffs called and ended up with nothing.

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