

## Job Offer Too Low? Use These Key Salary Negotiation Techniques to Write a Counter Proposal Letter

*by Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D.*

Here's an ideal scenario: After a grueling number of job interviews with a prospective employer who is hiring someone for the job of your dreams, you're again meeting with the hiring manager when she turns to face you and gives you the job offer, but at a salary below what you had expected. You are still excited, elated actually, but what you do next could have consequences for years to come.

Even if the job offer is acceptable to you, most career experts agree that you should take the time to clear your head and consider the offer -- away from the pressure of an interview. So, make sure to thank the interviewer for the job offer and express your interest in the job and the company, but ask for some time to consider all the details.

But what if the offer is unacceptable to you? If it really is one of your dream jobs -- or even simply a job you really want -- you should consider moving into the negotiation phase by making a counter proposal to the employer. That's what this article is all about -- taking you through the key negotiation strategies you should apply and providing you with one key tool -- the counter proposal letter -- as a means to negotiating a better offer for yourself.

(A side note: you can find more negotiating information and links in our [Salary Negotiation Resources](#) ... and while you're there, be sure and take a tour of our [Salary Negotiation Tutorial](#).)

### Negotiable Elements of a Job Offer

- *Salary*
- *Non-salary Compensation*: signing bonus; performance bonus; profit-sharing, deferred compensation; severance package, stock options
- *Relocation Expenses*: house-hunting, temporary living allowance, closing costs, travel expenses, spouse job-hunting/re-employment expenses
- *Job-Specific*: frequency of performance reviews, job title/role/duties, location/office, telecommuting, work hours and flexibility, starting date, performance standards/goals

## Key Salary Negotiation Strategies

1. Delay salary and benefit negotiations for as long as possible in the interview process. You'll have more power to negotiate when the field of candidates has been reduced to just you -- when the employer is completely sold on you as the best candidate for the position.
2. Remember that you'll have your greatest negotiation leverage between the time the employer makes the original offer and the time you accept the final offer. Once you accept an offer, you have little to no room to negotiate.
3. Don't negotiate at the time the initial job offer is made. Thank the employer for the offer and express your strong interest and enthusiasm in the job, but state that you'll need time to evaluate the entire compensation package. Most employers are willing to give you a fair amount of time to review -- and if you run across an employer who wants a decision immediately, consider long and hard whether you want to work for such a company.
4. Do your research. The greatest tool in any negotiation is information. Make sure you have done a thorough job of determining your fair market value for the job you are seeking, the salary range of the job for this specific employer, and geographic, economic, industry, and company- specific factors that might affect the given salary. Also try to obtain information on the employer's standard benefits package so that you have information beyond salary.
5. Just do it. While a large percentage of corporate recruiters (four out of five in one study conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management) are willing to negotiate compensation, only a small percentage of job- seekers actually do so. You don't have to be an expert negotiator to get a sweeter deal; you just need to know the rules and strategies of negotiation.
6. Negotiate to your strength. If you are a smooth talker (an extravert), call the employer and ask for a follow-up meeting to discuss a counter proposal. If you communicate better in writing, follow our guidelines for writing a counter proposal letter (below).
7. Always ask for a higher salary (within acceptable limits) than you are willing to accept so that when the employer counters your proposal, the salary should be near your original goal. And when possible, try and show how your actions (once on board) will recoup the extra amount (or more) that you are seeking -- through cost savings or increased sales revenue, productivity, efficiencies.

8. If the salary you're offered is on the low end -- and the employer has stated that salary is not negotiable (probably due to corporate salary ranges or pay grade levels), consider negotiating for a signing bonus, higher performance bonuses, or a shorter time frame for a performance review and raise. Always negotiate base salary first, and then move on to other elements of the job offer.
9. When presenting a counter proposal to the employer, be sure and include a few benefits that are expendable so that you can drop them in a concession to the employer as negotiations continue.
10. Remember that even if all salary issues are "off the table," there are still numerous other benefits you can negotiate, such as moving expenses, paid vacation or personal days, professional training, and more. See the sidebar for the entire list of negotiable items.
11. Never stop selling yourself throughout the negotiation process. Keep reminding the employer of the impact you will make, the problems you will solve, the revenue you will generate. And continue expressing interest and enthusiasm for the job and the company.
12. If you have no intention of accepting the company's offer, don't waste your time or the company's by entering into negotiation. Negotiation is a process designed to find common ground between two or more parties.
13. If you have multiple job offers, don't put the companies into a bidding war for your services; it rarely works out.
14. Don't enter negotiations with the wrong attitude. Always have in the back of your mind that your goal with these negotiations is a win-win situation. You want to get a better deal, but you also need to let the employer feel as though they got a good deal as well.
15. Given a number of factors, such as the strength of the economy, the size and vitality of the company, and the supply of job candidates with similar qualifications, some employers simply will not negotiate.
16. Never make demands. Instead, raise questions and make requests during negotiations. Keep the tone conversational, not confrontational.
17. Be prepared for any of a number of possible reactions to your counter proposal, from complete acceptance to agreeing to some concessions to refusal to negotiate.

18. You have to be willing to walk away from negotiations. If you don't have a strong position (a good current job or one or more current or potential job offers), it will be harder for you to negotiate. If you really need or want the job, be more careful in your negotiations.
19. Once the employer agrees to your compensation requests, the negotiations are over. You cannot ask for anything more -- or risk appearing immature or greedy and having the employer's offer withdrawn or rescinded.
20. Always be sure to get the final offer in writing. Be extremely wary of companies that are not willing to do so. Note: one advantage of writing a counter proposal letter is that you list the terms of the offer in your letter.

### **Writing the Counter Proposal Letter**

While there is not a specific formula to writing a successful counter proposal letter, there is a basic structure you can follow for maximum likelihood of success.

*First Paragraph: Statement of Interest and Enthusiasm for Job/Company; Key Selling Factors*

This paragraph is critical in setting up the tone and direction of the negotiations. Be direct and sincere in expressing your interest for the company, thanking the employer for the job offer. Be sure to follow-up with your key selling points -- how you will make a direct and immediate (or longer-term) impact on the organization.

*Second Paragraph: Negotiating Item #1 -- Offer and Counter Proposal*

Restate the particular point from the original offer that you wish to negotiate, followed by your counter proposal -- ideally supported through research, a desire to be fairly compensated, or reinforced by the value you will bring to the company.

*Third Paragraph: Negotiating Item #2 -- Offer and Counter Proposal*

Restate the particular point from the original offer that you wish to negotiate, followed by your counter proposal -- ideally supported through research, a desire to be fairly compensated, or reinforced by the value you will bring to the company.

*Fourth Paragraph: Negotiating Item #3 -- Offer and Counter Proposal*

Restate the particular point from the original offer that you wish to negotiate, followed by your counter proposal -- ideally supported through research, a desire to be fairly compensated, or reinforced by the value you will bring to the company.

*Fifth Paragraph: Negotiating Item #4 -- Offer and Counter Proposal*

Restate the particular point from the original offer that you wish to negotiate, followed by your counter proposal -- ideally supported through research, a desire to be fairly compensated, or reinforced by the value you will bring to the company.

*Concluding Paragraph: Conciliatory Comments with Strong Moving-Forward Statement*

Stress that your requests are modest and that your potential impact is great -- and that you look forward to accepting the job offer and getting a jump-start on the position as soon as possible.

You can also include paragraphs for items of the original proposal that you completely agree on -- doing so makes the letter seem more balanced and that you are not picking apart the entire offer.

You can also include paragraphs for any items in the offer that you need clarification-- or where you are seeking more information, typically for complex issues such as confidentiality and non-compete agreements, bonus plans.

## **Sample Job Offer Counter Proposal Letter**

What does a salary negotiation counter proposal look like? See our [sample counter proposal letter](#).

Questions about some of the terminology used in this article? Get more information (definitions and links) on key college, career, and job-search terms by going to our [Job-Seeker's Glossary of Job-Hunting Terms](#).

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Have you taken advantage of all of our [Salary Negotiation and Job Offer Tools and Resources](#)?