

## *Negotiating and Accepting a Job Offer*

Sometime in the later stages of your choosing process or perhaps even after you have chosen your favorite firm but before advising the firm that you have accepted the offer, you will be considering and assessing the various job-related characteristics of the offer. In some cases, you may be satisfied with the offer; in other cases, you may not be satisfied. These situations bring the need to negotiate the terms of employment. A number of dimensions may be the object of your negotiations. (See Exhibit 31-1 for a sample list).

While the characteristics of a job offer may or may not change as a result of negotiations, we believe it is important in the process of selecting a job that matches your self-assessment as well as possible that you take into consideration each of these characteristics and in so doing reduce the number of surprises you will have on the job. It is important to negotiate or discuss the specifics of these various characteristics before you accept an offer. Some corporations have policies for some of these characteristics that cannot be negotiated; generally, when you raise the question, they will advise you of this. Other corporations may be much more willing to meet your needs. In either case, before you accept a position, it is important that you understand the details of the offer clearly. Again, this will reduce the likelihood of both positive and negative surprises after you have already committed yourself.

### **Gentlemanly Agreements**

The first thorny issue around receiving and accepting a job offer relates to the desire of everyone not to be rejected. This is also true of organizations. Many firms will not make a job offer until they are reasonably sure that it will be accepted. This motivation will become apparent to you in your conversations with interviewers at the company. In fact, in some cases they may say: If you received an offer, would you accept it? This kind of approach puts the candidate in an uncomfortable position, and in reality may create additional problems for the recruiting organization because people who otherwise might have accepted offers later on might not be given the opportunity.

One student, after a day of interviews at her first-choice company, felt very confident that she was about to receive an offer. In the last interview of the day with the person charged with the responsibility for making offers, she was asked if she were to receive an offer, would she accept it. She had not yet learned all the details of that position, nor had she heard from her number two and number three choices. She did not know how the specifics of those offers might stack up against what appeared to be her primary interest. Her response was that she liked the company, but wanted to hear what a couple of other alternatives would have to say before she made

her decision. She sensed an immediate change in the attitude of the recruiter and felt as though she could almost see the offer being withdrawn.

In that case, this person, if made a firm offer, probably would have in the longer run accepted the company's offer. But the company's reluctance to extend that offer with anything less than 100 percent certainty made it difficult for her to make a commitment on the spot.

One way to deal with this problem is to express to the corporation your sincere and genuine interest in the company and in the position you have been discussing. Then go on to say that many of the details, not only of the job but of the life style associated with it, require further investigation in your mind, and that a real decision is only possible once all the details have been collected. Nevertheless, from all current indications your interest in that company is extremely strong and the probability is very high that if extended an offer you would accept it. This approach expresses sincere interest in the corporation and yet leaves the candidate the option of choosing another alternative if in some unforeseen way it should be more attractive.

### Buying Time

During the course of your analysis and choosing process, you may have looked at the details of job offers and know exactly what it is that you want. In many cases this will not be true, so that when you receive an offer you will need to buy yourself some time to consider the details. One response to a telephone offer is to say that it is very attractive and that you are appreciative of the company's expression of confidence, but that you would like to take one or two days to consider some detailed questions relating to the offer and get back to the individual to talk about some of those additional characteristics. You may at this point say that in principle the offer seems satisfactory, and you are very likely to accept it.

Then you can refer to Exhibit 31-1 and your self-assessment to develop specific questions about your activities, compensation, and the parameters that will constrain you when you join the organization. The question of how much to ask for depends upon the importance of the money criterion to you in your experiencing of the work and to the urgency of gaining employment. If you're low on funds and need work immediately, you may be more willing to sacrifice some of the details than if you are determined and have the means to wait for a more attractive and better-matching alternative.

### Exhibit 31-1

#### Negotiable Characteristics of Job Offers

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- Job content and activities
- Supervisor
- Title and its review period and likely next steps
- Location and office space
- Salary level, bonuses, and additional compensatory perquisites like stock options
- Starting time—that is, beginning work
- Vacations, holidays, sick leave
- Travel
- Overtime work
- Flexibility of working hours
- Moving expenses
- House hunting expenses
- Medical, life, and other forms of insurance
- Maternity leaves
- Educational participation programs
- Pensions
- Company expectations for performance in the first year of employment

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Most employers will leave a job offer open for a particular period of time. Frequently this period is two weeks, but it may extend up to several months. On occasion, companies will demand an immediate response. This they do at least in part because they want to feel that they are in the candidate's first choice, and are reluctant to hire people who would accept them only as their second or third choice. Unless you are very sure that the company that has extended you an offer is the right fit and that the details of job offers have been considered carefully, we do not recommend that you allow yourself to be pressured into making a commitment in the same moment that you receive an offer.

Again, the strategy employed above seems to provide an acceptable and usually effective alternative approach. Express your appreciation at the offer, and say that although it is extremely likely that you will accept it, you want a day or two to consider it carefully before you respond. In many cases, a day or two is insufficient time, and you may ask for a week to two weeks to consider the offer. This is not unusual in industry, and you should not feel embarrassed or unique for asking for this time. You might also make a point to the recruiter that it is in their best interest as well as your own that both parties have the opportunity to consider the match carefully.

## Assignment

Read the vignettes that follow. For each one, write down your specific plans for dealing with each of the situations. What would you say? What would you do? Where would you go? With whom would you talk?

### 1. *Salary Differentials*

You have just received an offer from Company XYZ, which is high on your priority list. During the day you discover from friends that other people have been given offers \$5,000 above yours. Knowing the people and the jobs they would be taking in the company, you do not understand the difference in salary, since you are at least as well qualified as they and the position you are being offered is at least as responsible as theirs.

### 2. *Moving Expenses*

You have just been offered a position in a distant city but do not have a lot of excess funds in savings

and personal bank accounts. You have learned from other people who have been given offers by the company that the company does not pay moving expenses.

### 3. *House Search Expenses*

You have a house, but have just been offered a position with a company in another city. You are to leave within the month. You are concerned about the time and expense of selling your own home and the time and expense involved in purchasing a new one in the city to which you're moving.

### 4. *Starting Work*

You feel mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted by the rigors of your academic program. Although the job you have chosen is exciting and stimulating, you are concerned about starting work immediately. You have sufficient money in your savings to spend a month or two on vacation, and even though you've heard the company needs you immediately, you are thinking about negotiating for a later starting date.