

The Secrets to Evaluating a Job Offer

And get the best deal possible

By Chere B. Estrin

Now that you been interviewed, interrogated, examined and polled about your skills, abilities, personality and attitudes, it's time to analyze and evaluate your initial response to a potential job offer. Perhaps you have never formally assembled this kind of information before and things have just come together for you in a natural, easy fashion. However, the new way of doing things is to prepare yourself for a negotiation by breaking it into logical, digestible and manageable pieces. Figuring out what is important allows for an easier negotiations. You'll stay grounded and clearer in your thinking. Don't shortchange yourself. Go after what you want and know when and where you can compromise. Clarifying what is important to you enters into every part of upcoming negotiations.

Your initial reaction

Let's face it. Job hunting can be stressful. By the time an offer does come in, you are probably ready to say yes just to end the ordeal. But guard against a quick response no matter whether your reaction is positive or negative. It is imperative that you think the offer through.

Few employers expect you to accept on the spot. So whether the offer has been presented over the phone or in person, it's probably best to wait at least 24 hours before accepting. This way, you can sleep on it. If you wake up in the morning feeling the same way, there's probably very little that can change your mind.

Timing is everything

Guard against waiting too long to accept an offer also. Waiting a few days may be acceptable for most employers. However, waiting a few weeks may put them off. Upon receiving the offer, you first need to ask the question, "How soon can I get back to you?" Try not to go beyond a week.

Employers don't like to stop their recruiting process for very long. It takes too much to ramp up again.

Some employers are put off by candidates who want to wait until all potential job offers are received to evaluate and choose. They want to know that you are enthusiastic about their firm. Others accept the fact that some candidates will have multi-offers and have no problem understanding that they are competing. Frankly, the more higher-brow the firm, the less likely they are to understand that a candidate wants to evaluate all offers. This attitude stems from almost arrogance. After all, they say, we are the Blank & Blank firm. We're the best! Why wouldn't someone jump at the chance to work here?

Should you ask for an offer letter? Today, many firms and corporations follow-up a verbal offer with an offer letter. This letter is not an employment contract. It is merely a letter which outlines the terms of the offer. It will include salary, benefits and start date.

Now that you have analyzed your priorities against this offer, it's necessary to analyze your understanding of how the employer arrived at his or her offer. Do you have all the facts? Do you need more information about this all-important decision you are about to make? Frankly, some people spend more time and energy investing and reviewing what kind of car they want to buy than they do in making a job decision. Review the following Job Opportunity Inventory Checklist and Offer Analysis Chart for just a few questions you'll need answered before your decision.

Using a Job Opportunity Inventory Checklist

Use the inventory checklist to see how the potential job stacks up against your personal priorities. Put a check mark (___) in the Personal Priority column next to each item that is important to you. Indicate how much the item is worth by ranking it from 1 to 10 with 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest. Next, in the Potential Offer column, weigh the offer you are considering and give it a 1 to 10 rating based on how well you perceive it stacks up against your priorities.

Offer Analysis

How did the law firm/corporation arrive at their decision?

Do you have a clear picture as to where your skills, expertise, level of experience and education fit within the firm?

Where do you compare to the person you may be replacing?

How does your background and expertise compare to the original job description?

How does the final total compensation figure stack up?

Do you know if you are offered market rate for your skills?

Has the employer articulated when you are eligible for a salary review?

How long has this position been available?

Has there been a hiring freeze? If so, what impact did the freeze play upon salary and candidate's level of expertise.

Do the benefits and perks make up for a less-than-desirable base salary?

Is the base salary less than anticipated but the chance for paid overtime an opportunity to earn some nice dollars?

What do you have to do to maintain the expectations of the firm regarding salary?

Is your future raise or bonus tied to billable hours?

Do you know what average billable hours are achieved by paralegals in this firms? (As opposed to expected hours)

What happened to the paralegal who was in this position prior to you? Was she promoted? Did she move on? Is this a high-turnover position or is it newly created?

How was it left after the offer was extended?

Is the firm expecting you to negotiate?

Weighing Your Options Carefully

If you are clear about the terms and conditions of the offer, you are now ready to compare them to your core priority. By being clear, you will be more centered and able to calibrate terms of the job offer against something valid and stable. If your approach to the offer is void of in-depth self-evaluation, you will probably find yourself swayed by aspects of the offer that might have short-lived meaning and value.

But sometimes there's an offer for a position that is totally the opposite of what you originally intended. If that happens, yet you are excited by this opportunity, ask yourself three basic questions:

What was my original intent?

What is acceptable about this offer?

How does that differ from my original intent?

Your next step is to compare this information to your core priorities. The next three important questions to ask yourself are:

What do I know about the offer?

What must I have? (Criteria that is absolutely not flexible.)

On what can I compromise? (Would be nice to have but really can be flexible)

And above all, before you accept any offer at all, you must ask yourself the most important critical question: *What is the downside of this position?* Then you must ask yourself: *Can I live with it?*

If an offer letter is forthcoming, wait until it arrives to fully evaluate your offer. There may be items in it that you had either not understood or were not aware. In any case, the offer letter will provide a clearer understanding of the offer.

Before you can negotiate your offer, you must understand the employer's point of view. Knowing the goals, needs and perspectives of the employer will give you a leg-up in your negotiations. Review the Offer Analysis Chart or make certain you have the information you need. Here is where it is useful to work with a staffing organization. If they are good, they will know the insides and outs of the firm. They will know weaknesses of the employer and how to get you the best offer.

Prepare to Negotiate

If you are not working with a staffing organization, however, there are certain things you'll need to know in order to prepare yourself for the actual negotiation. Gathering more information from the employer in a timely fashion could be difficult given how busy everyone is. Furthermore, you need to hit the employer just right. Pestering for information could give a very bad impression and push the employer into reconsidering his offer. Not asking enough questions could land you a job that you really don't want.

When an offer finally comes through, you may experience a range of emotions. Regardless of whether you are an entry-level paralegal or one who has battled the Bates Stamping Wars, the offer will make you feel great. Even if it's not ideal, an offer is a symbolic validation of your professional value. Make certain you recognize the accomplishment an offer represents.

When the afterglow of receiving the offer subsides, the reality sets in that the moment to negotiate has finally arrived. You can choose to

negotiate. You do have the choice not to negotiate!

However, if the offer is not quite right and you decide that you cannot compromise, you'll find yourself going back to the bargaining table. Rarely is there no room for some negotiation. It is almost impossible to have found yourself at the offer stage without some understanding between you and the employer that there are some commonalities. After evaluating your job offer, it's up to you to now negotiate wisely, carefully and above all, tactfully. Good luck and keep those options open!

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Job Opportunity Inventory

Priorities	Priority Y/N	Priority Rating	Potential Rating
1. Quality of Work			
2. Work Environment			
3. Specialty Practice			
4. Opportunity for more technology			
5. Title			
6. Growth Potential			
7. Friendly Supervisors/Colleagues			
8. Family Friendly Environment			
9. Manageable Billable Hours			
10. No Billable Hours			
11. Progressive atmosphere			
12. Private Office			
13. Corporate Environment			
14. Work in new industry			
15. Annual bonus			
16. Paid Overtime			
17. Tuition Reimbursement			
18. Great health benefits			
19. 401K Plan			
20. Open, friendly environment			
21. Lots of client contact			
22. Have fair amount of autonomy			
23. On-site day care			
24. Travel a reasonable amount			
25. Become a Road Warrior			
26. Work directly with Partners			
27. Opportunity for advancement			
28. Length of commute			
29. Ability to use my skills			
30. Increase my present salary			
31. Job-share			
32. Work from home part-time			
33. Association work supported			
34. More fun than present job			
35. More challenging than present job			
36. More stability			
37. Casual dress			
38. On-the-job training			
39. Associate level work			