

Six Steps to Handling Money Questions

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Everyone wants as much money as an employer is willing to shell out. Yet when it comes to job interviewing, salary questions make most people squirm. One reason is that such questions pressure you to tip your hand during the negotiating game. Winning the salary you want requires some evasive action on your part. Choose your words carefully, and don't be afraid to redirect a pointed question. These tips will help you stay in control of your compensation.

1. How to Handle Applications or Ads Requesting a Salary History

Diane Barowsky, who works in executive recruiting, advises job seekers not to include salary requirements. "True, when you leave out the information, you run the risk that the employer won't look at you because you've not put a salary in there," she says. "But you run a greater risk of selling yourself short, because you don't know what the range is."

Instead, write that you expect a salary commensurate with your experience and the job's demands. You could also write, "negotiable," because, frankly, salary is always negotiable.

2. What Are You Currently Making?

Answer carefully. State that the new job, while in line with your skills, can't compare to your current job. As such, your current salary isn't a good judge of what you should earn in this position. "Answer: What I'm making is not important," says Barowsky. "What is important is whether or not my skills are what you need, and I'm confident the range will be fair." This allows you to reveal your self-confidence.

In addition, this levels the playing field if there are two candidates, Barowsky says. If you're currently underpaid, answering such a question directly will work against you. "What if you work for a nonprofit, and your pay is lower than that of another candidate who has the same skills and experience but has a higher pay because he is with a corporation that offers competitive salaries?" Barowsky asks. "You could be hired at a much lower figure than the other person would have received. It's not the past salary that's important. It's the skills and experience and what you can do for the organization."

3. Get the Employer to Say a Number First

Every employer has a salary range in mind that it can most often play with, says Barowsky. "They have information you are not privy to," she says. "When you don't know what the employer has in mind, you can underbid yourself. Employers will jump on that. Later, you'll find out that someone two cubicles over from you is making more money for the same work you're doing." So find out what the range is before you state any salary requirements.

If the range is below what you want, state that you expect a range closer to XYZ. And make XYZ at least 10 percent to 20 percent higher than what you currently make. If you're grossly underpaid in your position, hike it even higher.

4. What If You're Really Pushed to State a Figure?

State a range that reflects the amount you want to make. And remember: Employers will always look at the low end of your range, so make the low end as high as you are comfortable with. If you make \$35,000, state a range of \$42,000 to \$55,000 or so.

5. Prepare Yourself by Doing Some Research

Research what others in the field make. Contact professional organizations and get their annual salary surveys. Read professional publications. Network and look on the Web to find out what others in your field are making.

6. Show Us Your Pay Stub

If an employer wants to contact your old employers to verify your salary, think twice about the job. Frankly, do you really want to work with someone who will intimidate you? "If they badger you during the interview, a point where they're supposed to be wooing and impressing you, think of what it'll be like when you go to work there," Barowsky says.

The bottom line is that not only do you want good pay, but you also want respect. And a job that provides mutual employer-employee respect is bound to reap rewards.